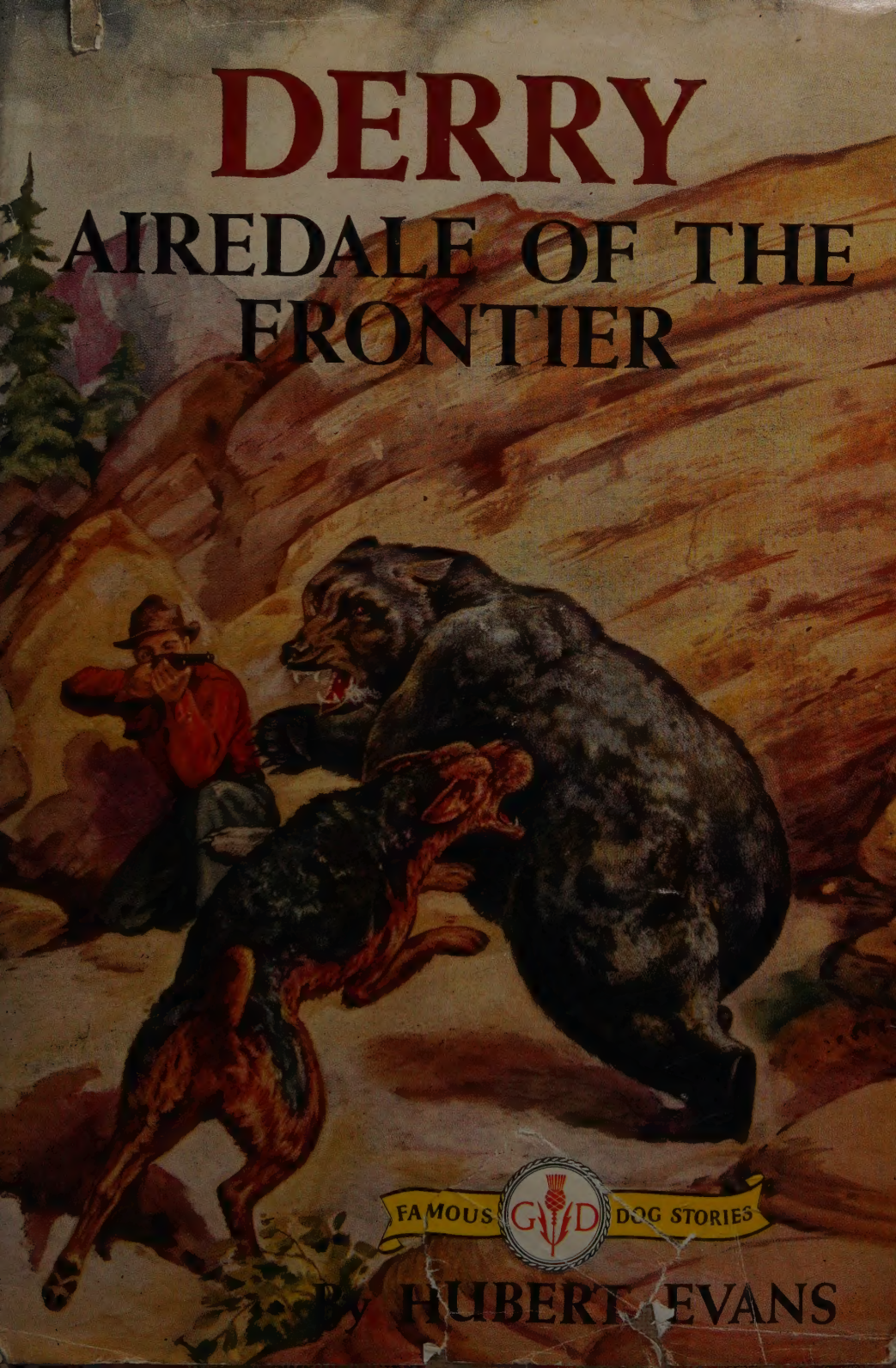
DERRY

AIREDALE OF THE FRONTIER



FAMOUS GUD DOG STORIES

By HUBERT EVANS

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DERRY

AIREDALE OF THE FRONTIER

By HUBERT EVANS

Here is a book for every boy who has owned a dog or who hopes some day to own one.

Derry was a finely bred airedale belonging to Ed Sibley of Twin Forks in the wild open country of the Northwest. As a young dog he was rather inclined to disobedience and wildness, qualities that disappointed his master, who had hoped to make a companion of him in that rough and often lonely country.

Later, however, Derry proved that there was real stuff in him, as he accompanied his master on hunting and trapping parties and, in several instances, played the leading role in a rather tight situation. Fights with bears, wolves, wild cats, and other animals of the forest lend excitement to the story.

And there is much more than merely a good story in this book. For in its pages you will find a great deal of information about how to manage a dog, how to correct his faults, and how to train him in good manners and usefulness.

GROSSET & DUNLAP
Publishers of WORDS: *The New Dictionary*
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DERRY—AIREDALE OF THE FRONTIER

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AIREDALE OF THE FRONTIER

By HUBERT EVANS

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CHAPTER I

THE MEETING

When he reached the top of the long hill which lay between the railway station and the settlement, Ed Sibley let the truck coast rapidly. Its battered mud guards flapped, the tools in the box under the worn seat clanged and as it jolted down the rutted road it seemed like some noisy, grotesque bird trying vainly to fly. Ed, who knew all the vehicle's weaknesses, would not have driven at such excessive speed at ordinary times but a hurry-up job at the garage had delayed him and the Eastbound Limited was due in less than five minutes.

As the truck careened around the last curve Ed caught sight of a plume of steam a mile down the valley where the railway came back to the river again after its detour through the rock cut behind Dome mountain. Even before he heard the blare of the whistle, even before he saw the locomotive plunge suddenly out of the dark green gateway where the right of way left the forest, Ed knew the engineer was sounding his three blasts for the brief stop at Twin Forks. The aristocratic Limited did not always deign to stop at the Forks, but to-day it would. The telegram in his pocket made him sure of that. Yes, he would be at the station

on time in spite of the annoying delay at the garage.

There was no actual need for him to be at the station when the train thundered to its brief stop. He was not going to board it and his express shipment would be put off even if he were not there to take charge of it in person. He knew this and yet he wanted very much to be present when they unloaded the crate containing his new dog. The pup would have been traveling since late the previous night and as its new owner he should make certain it had been fed and given enough drinking water. If there had been any neglect in these important matters he would let the express messenger know all about it. This pedigreed animal he had paid a city price for was no ordinary dog, picked up for a few dollars at a mountain town like the Forks or Division or Twenty Mile.

Word for word he recalled the telegram the station agent had given him that morning:

"Ed Sibley, Twin Forks.

"Your Airedale shipped as instructed. Advise meeting train. Know you will find him good worker.

"Dalmadge Kennels."

Here he was, one of the youngest sportsmen in Twin Forks, but the only one, young or old, to own a registered dog from the famous Dalmadge Kennels. At that time and in that frontier country on the far North Pacific slope, Airedales were new. In years to come when the breed had proved its worth, these members of

the great and valiant clan of terriers would be found among the packs of camp and settlement but at present they were almost unknown and unproved. They had yet to win a name for themselves among the thoroughbreds and cross-breeds of the frontier. So it was no wonder that young Sibley, the first person up or down the railway line to own one, wanted to meet the Eastbound Limited on that particular April day.

The truck beat the train to the station by less than half a minute. As it swung alongside the platform with its dented mud guards still palpitating from the race, the locomotive pounded over the switch points opposite the section house, and when the express car slipped past him Ed saw his crate beside the messenger at the open door. Yanking his old felt hat down over his eyes, Ed stepped briskly along the platform toward the water tank. He reached the express car close behind the station agent.

"Yours, I guess, Ed," the agent greeted him as the messenger dragged the crate out.

"Yep, that's it," Ed replied off-handedly, trying to appear as casual as if he frequently received dogs from the Dalmadge people.

"Happy-go-lucky little cuss," the messenger remarked. "We got real chummy, him and me—didn't we, boy?"

The eager young terrier yipped his confirmation.

Ed was too anxious to get a good look inside the crate to pay much heed to the messenger's remarks.

"He's a hum-dinger" he thought as he peered between the slats. The black-and-tan traveler stood on his litter of straw with sturdy legs braced and head and tail erect and undaunted. He pushed his black button of a nose through the slats and sniffed excitedly.

Ed touched the nose with the flat of his hand. It was cool and moist. "Seems to have stood the trip all right," he told himself. "You'll soon be outa that coop," he said aloud as he and the agent carried the crate to the truck.

A man approached the truck as Ed was securing the tailboard. By his hand baggage and his clothes Ed surmised he was a salesman of some sort, probably from the distant Coast City.

"How are chances for a lift?" the stranger asked genially. "You don't believe in hotel busses here, I see."

"Not that you'd notice," Ed grinned. "Sure, chuck your things in the back there and climb in. I'll run you up."

He raced the engine and, jamming in the clutch, sent the truck forward with a lurch which almost jolted the stranger from his seat. "Wouldn't think I worked in a garage, would you?" Ed apologized. "Fact is, I'm in a kind of hurry. That pup a' mine must be fed up to the nozzle with ridin' in such small quarters."

"Your dog, is he? I noticed him when we changed engines at Division. Going to give the Airedales a try, eh?"

"Yep."

"Know anything about the breed?"

"Nope. Nobody much does in this country. They're new dogs to us. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. In the smoker after we pulled out of Division we had quite a discussion about Airedales. I just wondered who the owner was."

"I see. Thought mebbe you might 'a' had one yourself."

The man shook his head. "I know next to nothing about dogs. A dog's just plain dog to me but one of the chaps in the smoker seemed to have had some experience with these Airedales. Does quite a bit of hunting, so he claims. Bear, cougar, and so on."

Ed's interest quickened. "I figger on using mine for that." He jerked his head toward the crate. "An all-round dog—that's what I'm after. And mebbe next winter I'll be on a trapline somewheres north of the valley. What's this fella think of Airedales? As a breed, I mean."

The man hesitated, then seeing that Ed expected an answer from him he went on. "Well, he didn't have much to say about them—as a breed. But he did have a good deal to say about two of them. The two he bought—then sold to get rid of."

"You mean—" Ed began.

"Hang it all, old man, don't think I'm a wet blanket. Anyway it's quite likely your pup won't turn out like his did." The man would have changed the subject but

Ed, apprehensive of what he might be told and yet feeling he would be satisfied with nothing but the facts —if they were facts—insisted on a more definite answer.

"What did he think of the pair he had?" he demanded.

"If you must know he said they weren't worth the powder to blow them to—blazes. Look here. I'm going to tell you something. No doubt you paid a good stiff price for this pup. Chances are you can get rid of him at a profit, right off, if you want to."

Ed found himself suddenly angry at having the keen pleasure of this long-anticipated hour spoiled by talk like this. He shifted gears savagely, raced ahead, then shot a question at the other.

"Why should I want to sell? This ain't no ordinary Airedale. This fella's from the Dalmadge Kennels."

"So were the pair this chap had. I wish you could have talked to him. He may have been talking through his hat for all I know. But he claims that the Dalmadge Airedales are fine for show, good bench dogs, big prize winners and all that, but as workers he had mighty little use for them. So, as I tell you, you can take the tip for what it's worth and if you want to you can unload your pup onto somebody. I suppose it'll be some months before he's old enough for any one to see what stuff he's really made of."

"Sell him? Huh! I see myself doing that," Ed commented. He turned sharply into the town's one straggling business street. Suppose the Dalmadge

people didn't produce the sort of Airedales they claimed they did—suppose he had been cheated after all. Some of the older men had told him it was nonsense to pay the price he did for the terrier and now, if the pup proved to be like the pair that man on the train was telling about, the old timers around town would never let him hear the end of it. They were everlastingly waiting for a chance to take a rise out of somebody. He shouldn't have been so cock-sure about this pup before he'd so much as seen it. Then in spite of all that the man beside him had said he refused to allow himself to doubt. "It's all bunk," he thought. "My pup's all right—I just know he is. Blinkin' hot-air artist!" he concluded as he stopped the truck at the garage.

The stranger got down, took his baggage and thanked Ed for the lift. Ed directed him to the settlement's one hotel and although he never saw him again, many times in the months which were to follow he pondered on what the man had said. For in spite of his avowed conviction that whatever others might say his pup would never prove a failure, the seeds of doubt had, unknown to him, been sown.

CHAPTER II

DERRY MAKES FRIENDS

The Comet garage, where Ed found occasional employment, was owned by Sandy Hoskins. For years, even when it had been a feed and livery stable during river steamboat days and afterwards while the railway was being constructed, it had been the meeting place for local hunters and fishermen. Colonel Dempster, a peppery old gentleman who had his own ideas of sport, had once said that more game was killed and more fish caught in the dingy office of the Comet than on all the hunting and fishing grounds of the valley. Almost at any time of day some of the less active of the out-of-door fraternity could be seen lounging in the decrepit bentwood chairs outside its door. When the weather was unkindly they moved their chairs inside—but inside or out the talk was much the same. Here any particularly good bags of game were brought to be proudly displayed and commented on, here big trout were weighed and measured with the utmost exactitude and their dimensions jotted down somewhere on the soiled board walls. Shotgun loads, the newest improvements in big game rifles, the latest thing in hand-tied trout flies, were debated heatedly and at greater length than the subject sometimes demanded.

Most of all the talk would turn to dogs, to bird dogs or cougar and bear dogs. More than on any other subject the Comet crowd had its decided views on dogs. Each faction had its fancies and aversions but on one point were they agreed—that ability and not show points was the thing which really mattered. And as Ed brought the truck to a stop on the grease spattered planking before the Comet doors that mid-day, half a dozen dog enthusiasts were ready waiting to pass preliminary judgment on a breed of dog they had never seen before.

Hoskins helped Ed unload the crate and carry it to the back of the garage and, while Ed was getting a hammer, old Bert Olson and the others strolled up to get their first look at this terrier pup of which Sibley had been talking so positively.

"Stand back and see a real dog, Bert," Ed jested as he loosened the first slat. Olson was the recognized local authority on spaniels and collies. They were the dogs that mattered. Terriers, he often said, were too flighty to suit him. He nodded shrewdly at Ed's parry.

When the second slat was off, two brown paws came up over the side, there was an impatient "woof" and an excited Airedale pup bounced to the floor. He stood with legs spread, shook himself vigorously, flirted his tail stub and ginned up at the circles of attentive faces.

In spite of himself Hoskins chuckled. "Cocky young devil, ain't he?"

"Good legs," one of the others commented.

"So that's what they call an Airedale," said Olson quietly and stood back to get a better look.

"What you going to call him, Ed?" one of the others wanted to know.

"Derry."

"Goin' in for fancy names as well as fancy dogs, eh?" Olson said. He intended to make the remark good-natured, but Ed, sensitive to criticism, felt there was a sting to the jest.

"Where'd you get that moniker—in a fairy story or somethin'?" the inquirer wanted to know.

"No chance. But there's enough 'Spots' and 'Rovers' and 'Curlys' in town already. Anyhow, on the pedigree they sent me"—Ed emphasized the word 'pedigree'—"there's a 'Terry' and a 'Jerry' so I just made him 'Derry.' Sounds all right to me. Here, Derry," he exclaimed, snapping his fingers.

The name meant nothing to the young dog but the snapping fingers were of themselves an invitation. He trotted expectantly to Ed, sniffed his boots, pretended to mumble a shoe lace tag, prodded Ed's leg with a clumsy paw, then spoke his greeting in a bark which was jocular and friendly. The men grinned.

"Yep, he's a real likely looking youngster," Hoskins stated thoughtfully. Hoskins knew dogs. In his younger days on the frontier he had prospected, had mushed dog teams up and down the river valley and he had that instinctive understanding of dog nature which is born in a man but which can seldom be acquired.

Here, he knew, was a dog of spirit; one that was sensitive and alert, who would learn readily if handled the right way but who, because of those very qualities, could be ruined by unwise treatment.

Before Derry had been out of the crate an hour he had made a friend in the proprietor of the Comet. The old sportsman liked his dashing style, his honest eyes, his brimming curiosity in everything about him. Whether he was sniffing at the most trifling of beetles crawling on fumbling legs across the garage floor or trying to supervise the jacking up of a three-ton truck, there was nothing half-hearted about his interest. The thing he was doing at the moment was for him the most important thing in all the world.

At one o'clock Ed pulled off his overalls and took a new collar and leash from the work bench. "Come along, Derry," he called. "We'll dangle up to the house and eat."

Hoskins and Olson stood at the open door and watched them go. Derry trotted ahead, straining on the leash with all the strength of his half-grown body, throwing his forelegs ridiculously high, swerving and trying to tow Ed behind him in his efforts to go across the street and become chummy with an Irish water spaniel twice his size. Even the cold aloofness of the old dog failed to dampen his spirits. He yapped an impudent greeting then hurried on to see what lay beyond the corner.

"The material's there, all right," Hoskins said.

"Depends on what you want in a dog. If Ed's fer buyin' a comedian he's got him. Fer myself I don't like to see a pup so cocky—so free an' easy. If one like that gets half a chance he's anybody's dog."

"Handled right, the pup'll come round. But Ed—well, I dunno. Ed never did strike me as much of a dog man. Lacks patience. Trouble is, Ed himself is too much like that terrier."

"How you mean?" Olson grinned, sensing a jest.

"I mean that pup'll likely turn out to have a mighty strong will of his own, for one thing. For another he's the kind that'll need steadyin' down. Both them are points that Ed's got. I'm fond of the young fella. He's like the pup—got good stuff in him. But what'll happen when the pair of them locks horns—well, I wouldn't like to so much as guess."

CHAPTER III

AN ALL-'ROUND DOG

Ed Sibley lived with his aunt, Miss Morris, at her house on Balsam Street. Weeks before, when Ed had begun to talk seriously of getting a terrier, she had been as favorably inclined toward the idea as it was possible for any one to be who had a passion for carefully arranged flower beds and whose pet saying was: "A place for everything, and everything in its place." But as she confided to a neighbor several days after Derry's arrival, "It might have been a lot worse. At least the young imp seems to have passed the teething stage. He's not everlastingly looking for things to chew up."

True, Derry prospected enthusiastically for buried bones at various places in the yard and once only her timely intervention—and a broom—prevented him from undertaking real mining operations in the best part of her asparagus bed. But everything considered she and Derry got along very well together until on a particularly bright morning during the first week of May Miss Morris decided to do a blanket wash as part of her program of spring cleaning.

It is doubtful if Derry would ever have given those snowy white blankets a second thought had it not

been for a cat, some unseen but decidedly "whiffy" mice and an abusive jay.

The morning had started promisingly enough. Immediately after breakfast Ed had taken the truck and with Derry on the front seat beside him had gone to the railway siding for a load of cement in bags. At the door of the freight shed Derry had sat trying to look vastly important and a trifle bored at the plodding activity of the men. What an absurd way for them to try and amuse themselves! That might be their notion of an exciting time but it wasn't his. This was a morning for worrying things, for rolling on one's back and exposing one's stomach to the warm sunlight. He got up, stretched himself and yawned with disarming innocence, then swaggered over to where the workers were passing back and forth from the freight car door to the rear of the shed.

At first he merely sniffed their legs as they passed him, then he tried to crowd inside the freight car and when he was ordered out he yapped impudently. Ed, who had gone to the section house with a bucket for water for the radiator, came back in time to find his pup making one valiant—but unappreciated—effort to speed up this sluggish, man-made game.

"Hey, you!" he shouted. "Don't be so full a' beans, see? Hop into this truck and sit there."

Derry might have pretended not to understand but when he saw Ed advancing with purpose in his eye he decided that a bluff would not work. He started

toward the truck, walking past Ed at a rate nicely calculated to preserve some show of dignity and yet rapid enough to save him the disgrace of being carried there by the scruff.

"Home's the place for you while I'm on this job," Ed told him as they started up town, and after unloading the truck at the general store he detoured by Balsam Street, where he stopped only long enough to drop the pup inside the picket fence and make sure the gate was latched. Derry whined a little as he saw his master drive away. He put his head first to one side, then to the other, and examined the fence with puckered brow as if estimating his chances of clearing it in one soaring, greyhound leap. But then something reminded him of the scrap of breakfast he had left on his plate at the back door and he jogged around the house to see about it.

The longer he thought about it, the more positive he seemed to be that the scrap he had left was a particularly choice one. He broke into a canter, almost skidded as he turned the corner, only to find that his plate was empty.

Huh! So a fellow couldn't leave anything lying around, eh! He stalked up to the plate and sniffed it to discover the culprit. Miss Morris had touched that plate—perhaps she'd sneaked out and had a snack between meals. But then he got a scent which upset that theory. Yessir! That snooping Dempster cat again—the slant-eyed thief!

Intent on revenge, he started across the yard. His business-like trot made it clear that nothing could divert him from inflicting punishment on the cat, but as he rounded the end of the woodpile a dank, enticing odor came to his nostrils. He pounced at the pile and jammed his muzzle between the ends of cordwood close to the ground. He inhaled gustily, snorted his nostrils clean and inhaled a second time. By Heck! he'd guessed it. Mice!

He drew back his head, cocked it at a knowing angle and listened acutely. Mice all right, as sure as he was a terrier. Oho! so they'd "eeh-eeh" at him, would they? The blighters—he'd show them who was boss in this yard. Immediately he attacked the earth at the edge of the pile with flying paws.

But the ground was harder than it looked and there were stones in it—stubborn stones that refused to budge for him. He pressed his nose into the small hole he had made and snorted. The mice under the pile scampered in panic. He was starting to dig again when a shadow swept across the side of the wood pile and a Steller's jay alighted on the post to which the end of the clothesline was fastened.

The jay—a dark blue bird with a pointed crest which made it look like a jockey with his cap on backwards—regarded Derry with a wicked eye and gave a rasping "Ya-a-ah!"

Immediately the mice, like the pilfering cat, were forgotten. Derry whirled to face the jeering one. His

glare was a warning for it to go about its business, but the jay merely leaned outward, stretched its neck and derided him hoarsely.

Cats, and mice—and now this taunting bird! Really it was more than a dog of spirit could stand. A shrill sound that was half bark and half an outraged whine came from him as he left the ground in what he fondly fancied was a panther-like spring—but which was really a clumsy hop upward. Then he slipped and thudded against the post. The jay descended to the clothesline, teetered there and squawked with ribald laughter.

That thud against the post had driven from Derry's head the idea of direct assault. He resolved to try strategy. Ah, but he was the wily old fox, as that jay would soon learn to its sorrow. He deliberately turned his back on his tormentor and, sitting down, pretended to be deeply occupied in scratching his right ear. He did not so much as glance at the enemy.

But the jay was not deceived by the move or by the busy thump-thump of Derry's hind elbow on the ground. On the forested hills behind the settlement he had often outwitted adversaries who would make this awkward pup seem ridiculous.

He gave one rasping call and boldly glided close above the terrier's head, then alighted on the chopping block which Ed had placed near the woodshed door to split the kindling on. With a laughable attempt at craftiness Derry sidled forward, pretending not to

know such things as jays existed. He was almost ready to charge when the jay sailed mockingly to the woodshed roof. From there it swooped to the long row of raspberry canes and with frequent stops and much hoarse chortling it led Derry right to the back of the yard, then sailed away with a last burst of satanic laughter.

Derry was nursing a grouch when he came soberly back toward the house. Cats, mice, birds—every living thing he had met that morning seemed in league to outwit him. He felt glum. But when he saw what Miss Morris had put out on the clothesline during his fruitless pursuit of the jay, his gloom vanished. There, flapping provocatively in the breeze, was a pair of nice white blankets.

Carefully Derry looked at the back door and the windows at either side of it. No Miss Morris there. He gazed at the woodshed—not a soul in sight. He tried to make his glance seem careless but his tail stub was not as erect as the tail of a guileless pup should be. In his mind caution and desire struggled—and desire won. With a low whine of impatience he bounded forward and snapped at the corner of the blanket which swayed so tantalizingly in the wind. He missed it, saw it beckon and then, rearing on his hind legs, gained a hold as the wet cloth flipped him smartly across the eyes. The wind bellied the blanket, lifted him clear of the ground and dropped him suddenly. Still he kept his hold.

Then he began to threaten the blanket with throaty growls. It would, would it? Hang there and make faces at him, eh? He'd jolly well show it where to head in at. Here was one adversary that could not elude him as those other tricky things had done. When the first clothes pin dropped he felt positive of winning.

A heave—a strain—a wrestle—and two more pegs came loose. He took a fresh hold and yanked the remaining ones out. Now the line was bare and the blanket on the grass. This was victory for you, this was all that any pup could wish for. He took a running leap and planted four muddy paws on it. As he worried it and tried to drag it across the yard he forgot such trifling things as cats and mice and jays. Here was something vastly larger than himself, something a fellow could really get his teeth into, something to be worried to bedraggled sogginess.

"Gurr-rrh!" he panted as he hurled himself upon his hapless victim and buried his head in its clinging folds. "Grr-r-r-rh!" he repeated and started to wriggle farther in.

The sound suddenly stuck in his throat as he felt a hand seize him across the back of the neck. He wallowed wildly but the next instant he was whisked off his feet and shaken until his teeth rattled.

"You wretch—you young wretch!" Miss Morris was saying angrily.

Unwittingly Derry did a wise thing in not trying

to struggle. He hung limp from her outstretched arm, his tail clamped tightly down, his ears flattened and his eyes screwed shut against the sight of the terrible fate he was certain was about to overtake him.

His woeful face and dangling legs were too much for Miss Morris' anger. "Edward told me you were an all-round dog," she exclaimed. "But for the rest of the morning you won't be. You'll be locked in the woodshed until dinner time."

Even that punishment was not carried out to the full. The pup's honest dismay overcame her resolve and when Ed came down the street at noon Derry was seated on the front door mat doing his best to impersonate a large watch dog—a peace-loving fellow who never, on any provocation, got into scrapes.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAIL OF SURPRISES

EACH spring almost every fisherman in Twin Forks went at least once to Swan Lake, a body of water some three miles long, which lay on the forested flat behind the settlement. Because of intensive fishing in years gone by there were not many trout there but big ones were sometimes caught in May and early June, when the salmon yearlings were leaving the lake on the start of their long journey down to the distant North Pacific. And one Friday at the Comet, when an unsuccessful angler came with news of an exceptionally large trout which he had tried in vain to catch at the lake's outlet, Ed Sibley decided to try his luck next day.

He would have preferred going alone but when Bert Olson suggested that they go together Ed could do nothing but agree. Immediately after an early breakfast the pair set out on the mile walk back to the lake where, by means of an old Indian dugout canoe which was cached there, they could get to the best fishing grounds at the outlet at the far end of the lake.

Derry, to his chagrin, was left behind. But his master had not long been out of sight before he was able to evade the supervising eye of Miss Morris and leave

the house by the back way. Ed's scent was strong on the moist earth of the old skid road and Derry, to his evident delight, was able to follow the trail. But when he arrived at the landing stage at the lake the two men were in the canoe half a mile down the lake.

Already the first slanting shafts of sunlight had shredded the lake's night blanket of mist until only drifting tatters of it lay in the end of sheltered bays. The sky was infinitely blue and from the shallows came the voice of water fowl welcoming the sun's return.

As Derry sat disconsolately on the extreme end of the landing stage he could hear the quavering call of "Klahowya" ducks and from a distant point a lone gander on sentry duty honked a reassuring message to its flock that they could feed without fear of any slinking foe.

Derry's forepaws shifted nervously as he watched the distant glint of the canoe's paddles. He stood up, braced his front legs, leaned forward and stretched his hind ones, shook his head so vigorously that his ears flapped softly, then sat down on precisely the same spot from which he had risen. He straightened his back, thrust his head out as he looked across the blue water at the canoe and then in his brown eyes dejection gave place to scheming. Slowly his tail rose and, completely possessed by his bright idea, he turned and raced along the landing stage to shore, where he struck off along the water's edge. Refuse to stick with the gang, would they? He'd show them. He ran hard.

At this rate he wouldn't be long in coming abreast of that pair of base deserters.

Derry was determined but, alas for his plans, he was also intensely curious. He could see he was gaining on the canoe but as he galloped through the sunlight of the first point, he heard an odd thudding noise from somewhere among the alder clumps. Still running, he turned his head as if resolved to make his investigation on the fly. But in spite of himself his pace slackened, he trotted—walked—stopped to listen. He looked at the distant canoe, decided he could spare a moment and then, as if drawn by some magnet, moved softly toward where the alders stood so densely in their new green. No doubt about it, that was a mighty odd sound. He threw up his head, narrowed his eyes and sniffed.

The thudding sounds were becoming steadily louder, the interval between them less. Like beats on some barbaric drum they filled the air about him and set up a tingling vibration in his ears. Then, as if angry with him, they fell faster and faster until they became one whirring roll. Then abruptly they stopped.

Derry cocked a puzzled eye at the tree tops, at the alder clumps, at the ground directly in front of him. In spite of its volume he could not be sure of the sound's direction. He even spun around to see if the drummer had somehow sneaked up close behind him. But nowhere could he discover a living thing. Something queer about this!

By George! the critter was at it again. Ump—ump—ump—ump— Derry thought it must come from somewhere in the lake, but as the beats quickened they became more localized. Derry turned toward the willows, gave them a threatening look and then took a few steps forward. He felt he was being very daring but his slightly crouched hind legs betrayed him by showing how ready he was for headlong flight. He glanced far up the lake and the sight of the canoe reassured him. He certainly wasn't going to run away. What sort of dog did they think he was? As he advanced among the first clumps he even managed to strut a little.

The drumming ceased and on the opposite side of the clump Derry could hear dry leaves crackling under a stealthy tread. He arched his neck so that his absurd fringe of chin whisker touched his chest and put his head at a most knowing angle. Aha! there it was again. But now the footsteps were farther from him. So this unknown thing was trying to pussyfoot away from him. Huh! There'd been quite enough of this foolery. With a commanding yap to stand and surrender he bounded into the patch of sunshine.

Instantly he wished he hadn't. There was a thunderous whirring and the beaten air swirled about his head. He squinted his eyes and tried to duck. Now he was in for it! And then he saw the willow grouse leaving the ground almost under his feet.

The bird, which a few moments before had been

drumming its mating call, now used its wings for flight. It swerved among the tops of the bushes and was out of sight almost as soon as Derry recovered from his fright. He barked and went proudly back to the beach. He could not exactly boast he had caught the bird but he had at least taught it not to go making a rumpus like that in any piece of woods patrolled by a vigilant terrier like himself.

He sat on the sand to scratch his ear. He looked across the blue water sparkling in the sun. What was he doing before he went to put that noisy bird into its place? Ah, yes, he'd been hurrying to overtake his master. He jumped up, shook the sand from his coat, flirted his tail and cantered along the beach. The canoe was still a long way ahead.

For half a mile he never stopped. He wanted to, for there were plenty of interesting things along the way, but he'd made up his mind to let those fellows see he was not to be left at home like a mere kitten. The strengthening sunlight was drawing enticing odors from the fringe of forest; he saw at least a dozen small birds that were badly in need of discipline, and there was a smart-aleck of a sandpiper that went teetering before him on its spindle-legs and peeped insolently at him. These were all things that would have to wait. A pup—even an Airedale pup—could not be expected to attend to everything at once.

Even when he came to a strange scent in a muddy place he only slowed to a walk and circled the imprint

in the black earth. A rounded foot had stepped there and left a mark like the heel of a great human hand with a row of stubby toe marks in place of fingers. The scent was distinct but not fresh enough to be compelling. Derry knew it was made by a large animal but as yet he knew nothing of bears and so after one last hurried sniff he struck off again along the shore.

He ran quickly, for the canoe was angling out of sight beyond the point ahead. It disappeared and then the wilderness seemed a large and lonely place. After all, he was a small dog to be journeying so far alone.

A few hundred yards farther on he learned that mere running would never take him to Ed Sibley. The sand beach ended, there were stones, then earth with grass tufts dotting it as he reached a creek flowing lazily into the lake. It was twenty feet to the opposite bank and the channel was so full he could but dimly see the bottom under six feet of sluggish water. It was a serious barrier and, realizing this, an anxious whine trilled from his black lips.

If the bank had been sloping he might have waded out and tried to swim. But there was a two-foot drop to the water and though he crouched, he drew back, afraid to make the leap. Perhaps there was some other way. Certainly he had come too far to turn back and go home to grovel at the feet of Miss Morris. He struck toward the forest to follow the creek upstream.

For fifty yards the bank was lined with reeds and grass and hard-tack bushes. There was a narrow pool there, a pool so deep that the water darkened into blackness without any sign of bottom. Among the underbrush were old trails cut by the bank beavers who once had occupied the pool. Derry followed one of these trails until it looped back to the deep water, then he struck off along the bank and into the shadows of the evergreens. When he came to the creek again he found it running swiftly over stones. He could see the bottom easily and was about to turn away when he realized that the eddies behind every bowlder were alive with fish. He almost snorted with surprise.

The suckers had left the lazy lake water, which they loved, to ascend the creek in search of spawning places. Somewhere upstream they would find the spawning grounds they sought, but because the fast water was foreign to them they tired easily and had to rest in almost every backwash. Derry did not know what they were doing there. He only knew it delighted him to see them stampede at his approach. At every bend he found schools huddling in the lee of bowlders. Had the water not flowed with such alarming speed and brawled so loudly he would have jumped among the timid water dwellers.

Even here, however, he could find no way to cross. Then, rounding a turn, he came to where a small hemlock had fallen and spanned the hurrying water. On it he could reach the farther bank. He took a few

cautious steps, found the log was solid and started confidently over.

There were suckers even under the log. The sight of the moving form above them was alarming and they fled from their cramped havens, were caught broadside and swept down-stream. Derry's lower jaw dropped in a grin. It made him feel important to put so many fish to flight. And so, because his glance was downward, he did not see the animal that crouched upon the log before him.

It wasn't much of an animal for size and it certainly looked neither dangerous or savage. Its body was gray, grizzled in places and was covered with the coarsest hair he had ever seen. He growled for it to back up and let a real dog past. But the sluggish creature merely turned partly round, looked fixedly at him with its little eyes and moved its short tail in a slow motion which Derry thought was vaguely challenging.

If it was fight the creature wanted it shouldn't have long to wait. Why, one good nip would send it helter-skelter along the log, and if it refused to back up here was the very terrier who would push it into the water. Derry took one threatening step forward. He took a second step and bared his milk-white fangs to show what a desperate character he was. And then that insignificant tail of his opponent flipped like lightning at him and his muzzle was stabbed in half-a-dozen places.

All at once the creature seemed to have become twice

its former size. Derry tried to turn, his claws clutched wildly at the log and then, with a loud wail, he pitched into the creek and left the porcupine in possession of the foot-log.

When his head came above water he was ten feet down-stream. Even had he wanted to renew the fight he could not for he was being borne swiftly toward the lake. Now and then his paddling feet struck bottom but when he tried to stand the water snarled at him and swept him on again. He clawed vainly at bowlders as he passed but they were wet and slippery. He tried to reach the shore but each time the water carried him to midstream. He was hurried on and on, and behind him panic spread among the suckers.

The water was ice-cold but after the first mad scramble he kept his head and did not try to fight the stream. His feet did little more than keep him afloat and as he was carried along he watched for foothold on the bank. Soon he was back at the beaver pool. The banks were even more abrupt here but ahead, where the creek met the lake, the east bank had crumbled. He shook the water from his ears, laid his head low and struck out down the pool for the broken bank.

His face still carried the porcupine quills and his spirits were low after the buffetings of this last half-hour. He got foothold where lumps of earth had made a staircase and was drawing himself from the water when a loud "ka-honk!" rang out like a bugle note of warning.

Immediately the air was filled with the disordered clanging of the geese which had alighted to feed among the grass tufts only ten minutes before. Their flying forms were everywhere and because of the attack at the foot-log he was an easy prey to apprehension. Now, in the very heart of this turmoil, he saw no escape.

But no misfortune could kill that plucky terrier spirit. With a snarl, he drew himself up to the muddy ledge and prepared to fight against overwhelming odds.

It took him a moment to see that instead of being attacked, he had put a score of geese to flight. There they were, a long line of them, in a waving column of retreat. The realization that he alone was responsible for this made him feel quite truculent again. He climbed the bank and looked up the creek as if he thought of going back to give that stupid creature at the foot-log a proper drubbing. But the quills in his muzzle soon made him change his mind. Well, anyway, he was on the right side of the creek and there was the canoe not far ahead.

He galloped steadily on. The clean air refreshed him and soon his tail resumed its jaunty angle. Everything considered, he had come out of that scrape rather well. By the time he had gone half a mile his lighthearted bearing suggested that the entire affair had been a success. A sandpiper skimmed before him. Didn't it know he was the dog who had whipped a porcupine? Hadn't it seen him make all those big birds

go flapping away in terror? He barked, but the sandpiper twitted him saucily.

When Derry thought of the canoe again he saw it nearing the point near the outlet of the lake. Before the shore took him out of sight he saw the men land, and fifteen minutes later he reached the thicket on the point. Then, with his race almost won, Derry was troubled by a sense of guilt. His elation vanished. After all, his master had told him to stay home and, contrary to orders—here he was. What had he better do now?

He stopped, perplexity evident in the droll lift of his ears and in his drooping tail. But it was only a moment before his brimming optimism returned to him. After all, what was an order on such a day as this? Of course Ed would be pleased to see him—wouldn't he himself be pleased to see Ed? With an excited yip he crashed through the brush and almost before he knew it he found himself in full view of the two men who were slowly paddling their canoe close to shore.

"Well, may I be ——" Ed began, and then at the incredulity in the face of his elderly companion, he burst out laughing. "Talk about not being able to lose a cat! That Derry pup's got 'em all beaten to a fare-ye-well."

As Derry saw the canoe swing inshore his elation knew no bounds. He splashed into the shallows to meet it and without being invited tried to scramble over

the side until Ed reached down and unceremoniously lifted him aboard.

Immediately he was in, Derry braced his legs wide apart and shook himself so vigorously that both Olson and Ed were half drenched.

Olson yelled at him and then looked at Ed. "Well, what you goin' to do to him?" he wanted to know.

"Can't do anything—we're 'most wet already. He'll learn manners by an' by."

" 'Tain't manners I'm talking about. It's discipline. He followed you after you told him to stay behind. Now you make a fuss like he'd done something smart. You're sure starting him off right—ain't you?"

"Gosh, Bert—I—why, I guess just this once won't make much difference. Why, he's followed a good long way. He's had some hard travelin' just to get to me."

"What's that got to do with it? It'd be the same if he only followed yuh acrost the street when you told him not to."

"I can't see how—" Ed began.

"Y' can't? Well, before yer through—y' will."

CHAPTER V

TROUT

The river that drained Swan Lake was a pleasing stretch of water. Tall cedars flanked it in two uneven walls of green and between its broad pools riffles of hard-packed gravel, over which the water danced, spanned it from shore to shore. While Ed and old man Olson, with the self-satisfied pup amidships, paddled the canoe slowly toward where the edges of the lake converged they could look down that winding stretch of clear water, over the first riffle and across the idling backwaters below. The sun was still off the far side of this first pool and as they got ready the grapnel which was kept in the dugout for river fishing they saw a quick splash and a widening circle on the shaded water. Then a second ring from closer to shore spread until the two overlapped.

"The rise is still on," Ed commented.

Olson nodded in quiet anticipation and Derry, staring over the side at his own reflection, seemed attempting to convey the impression that he too was pleased. They'd had quite a time getting here, the three of them, each in his own way, but here they were, ready for whatever fun might lie ahead. Olson headed the canoe toward the shaded end of the riffle and when they

were close to it Ed dropped the grapnel. The canoe swung bow upstream, the grapnel dragged a few feet with a dull tinkling sound, then its flukes found holding bottom and Olson was in position to try his luck—to lay down the first fly he had had a chance to cast this year.

Immediately he began to set up his old greenheart rod. The cork grip was stained, the brass fittings worn and the top joint had been carefully spliced. Not many greenhearts nowadays, Olson thought. Folks went in for split cane, but he stuck with the greenheart. Often at the Comet he had tried to explain his preference but he could not find just the words to express the stately grace, the dignity about the sweep and feel of it, which he could not get from a cane rod. Somehow for him they wouldn't lay the fly down with the same deliberate smoothness.

"Lots of fellers claim greenheart's easy broke," he told Ed as he was setting up his rod, "but it'll stand a lot of hard usin' if you treat it right."

He slipped his old solid brass reel into the seating below the cork grip and threaded the line through the leads. That gave him some trouble, for his hands were trembling a little from his eagerness. He hitched a light leader to the line. Then he opened his fly box. It contained, in dressings of varying size, a limited selection. There were the two coachmen, brown hackles, black ants, Parmachene Belles, silver doctors, march browns and one or two of unnamed patterns that he and Hoskins had designed years ago for use on this river.

He chose a medium-sized march brown, and after trailing the cast over the side he further softened it in his mouth and made fast his eyed fly. Then he stood, made a few preliminary sweeps with the rod, and laid the fly on the dancing water below as gently as a snowflake.

On his third cast a trout rose. From the shallow "spat" it made he knew it was small, so instead of striking he lowered his rod point and gave it a foot or two more of line. The little trout curved upstream and leaped. The fly came free.

Derry looked excitedly at the leaping troutlet, then when it disappeared he glanced sharply about him. He even examined the trees fringing the pool. Perhaps the fish had gone to roost up there. A fellow never knew. His sharp bark tried to tell Olson this and when it was ignored he gave the old angler an accusing look.

More to the left, almost in midstream, a better fish rose with a quick surge. Before the bubbles made by its rise had broken, the march brown came softly to the spot. The trout took it eagerly. The old greenheart twitched.

The fish cut into the riffle where the fast water thrummed on the tautened line. It leaped, shook itself in air and plopped under again, heading toward the far side. The reel ran easily with only the slightest pressure of the old man's fingers breaking it gently. The trout struck into the fast water again, leaped, plunged, swerved and was away down the pool.

While it made its first wild struggles the pull of the line seemed trifling but as it fought more deliberately the line became more aggressive. It angled across the pool but before it had sped many yards along a straight course the line turned it into a curve that headed it upstream. Again it became frantic, darting close to the surface, then leaping again and again. It turned toward the bottom and with laboring head and tail tried to gain the darkness of the stones below. But the pull against its head became a lift. At last it was stalled. Though its tail still tried to thrust it downward the line held its head. It shot in a mad flurry to the top to thrash and roll. Then the line came taut again. As it was drawn in it saw the canoe and dashed away. Again it was brought alongside. Ed took it aboard with the dip-net.

Olson looked at his first fish of the year. It was a perfect trout, clean as new snow, its back fat, its sides and belly not yet put slightly out of proportion by the morning gorge of fly. The mottled colors of its head and back were good and in the folds below its jaw were the two dark red stripes that mark the thoroughbred cutthroat.

Derry came scrambling over the thwart as his master lifted the trout from the dripping net. Ed, knowing that until Olson forgot his pup's transgression of that morning, it might be well to keep him in the background, tried to shove him away, but Derry ducked under his hand and snapped at the struggling trout. Its

spread tail slapped him smartly on the nose. He sneezed and before he could investigate further the fish was killed and out of sight in the creel.

From the corner of his eye Ed saw a flash as a small fish, a trout or salmon, skittered across the surface of the shallows in the pool below. It was trying to gain the shelter of the trailing cedar boughs. He watched for the big fish he knew must be chasing it. He could see the following swell as the enemy raced through the shallows close behind the little fish. A clumsy splash and the yearling was caught.

"That's a real oldtimer," Ed exclaimed. "Wonder if that's the one they were telling about."

"Bet your life. Not much chance of they being two as big in this bit of river. Didn't take long for us to locate him. Now for the real battle."

Olson put on his heaviest leader and the biggest silver doctor from the fly box. Then he cast to the head of the shallows and let the fly sink as the sagging weight of the line moved it through the water. He kept the rod tip twitching so that the silver and blue fly acted like a frightened minnow. It swept through the water in an arc, was lifted and laid down a foot farther into the shallows near where he knew the char should be lurking. Up it came and was laid down again. Still there was no sign of the cannibal.

"It'll be somewhere close," Ed suggested and carefully reaching for Derry held him beside him in case the pup stepped on one of the paddles or in some

other way caused a thump or jar on the bottom of the canoe, which Ed knew, was a certain way to alarm near-by fish.

For the third time Olson was drawing in the free line with his left hand, ready to cast again, when Ed saw it tauten suddenly.

"Got it!" he exclaimed. Olson's right forearm crooked quickly and the big fish was hooked!

Its tactics had none of the swiftness of the true trout. But it swam savagely and strongly, giving promise of a stiff fight. As it made out into the pool it shook its head sullenly. These big Dolly Vardens were often dour fighters. "Eight pounds, mebbe ten," grunted the old man.

"All of that," Ed agreed.

The char went straight across the pool, then turned down-stream. Olson checked it as much as he dared, yet the line was going steadily from his reel and the big fish showed no inclination to let itself be turned. It was heading for the next riffle. Should it get through it Olson knew his tackle was not strong enough to bring it back into the pool. It would not even stand the strain of hauling the dead weight of such a fish through that fast water.

"I'll give it the butt," he announced, holding the point of the rod higher and checking the line as much as he dared. Though the char slowed down because of the increased resistence, it did not turn. It seemed to

be keeping close to the bottom and boring its way toward the riffle. Neither Ed nor Olson could see it but they knew that somewhere at the foot of the pool their quarry was coming closer to the fast water. Yes, now it was moving more quickly as the current came to its aid. Now it was swept over the riffle. It would sulk there and defy all efforts to bring it into the pool again.

"All right, we'll go down after it," Olson said grimly and Ed, releasing Derry, hauled in on the grapnel line. When it was off the bottom the canoe drifted quickly over the riffle. While Olson kept his line taut by reeling in, Ed paddled slowly through the pool and over the second riffle. Then he anchored while Olson renewed the battle.

The char wanted to sulk, but Olson would not allow that now. With quick jerks he roused the fish to action. It turned sulkily and went across the pool, sometimes spurting, sometimes stopping as it shook its head.

The big fish was not swimming so deeply now and both Ed and Olson knew it would soon make one of its floundering leaps. Olson was ready and gave it slack when he felt the upward rush. When it fell and turned to go down-stream again he forced its head up. The advantage was his and he did not intend to surrender it.

"It's as good as yours," Ed encouraged. And to

himself he thought: "Kinda glad I didn't set up my rod and start fishing straight off. Old Bert'll get a big kick out of this."

At last through the water they saw the white belly glimmer as the char swung heavily, close to the downstream end of the canoe. With weary but powerful sweeps of its tail it gained a few yards of line, only to be brought close to the dugout again.

"Ready with the net, Ed," Olson exclaimed tersely. Ed released the young terrier to seize the landing net, and Derry, frantic at sight of the big fish so close to the side of the canoe, put his paws on the gunwale and whined his eagerness.

"Next time I swing, get the net under it," Olson warned.

Though it was all but exhausted the big cannibal of the pool had a little strength left. When it saw the canoe it shot under it and the leader came taut against the craft as Olson turned it. Derry leaned far out, barking wildly, and as the char swerved the leader fouled his neck. The unexpected touch made him jerk back and while he still had most of the strain on the thin line the char came up, thrashing wildly.

At last it had something solid to struggle against and as it spun in its flurry, the hook was disengaged. Ed scooped with the net as it dived wearily—but the big fish of Swan River had escaped them.

Except for one exclamation of utter disgust, Olson had little to say about the loss of the quarry coveted by

every angler in Twin Forks. But as the morning wore on Ed found himself wishing that the old man would voice his thoughts. "Wish he'd get it off his chest and have done with it," Ed thought. "Instead of that he'll save it all up for when he tells the Comet bunch. Guess me an' Derry'll have to stand the gaff for this."

For the rest of the forenoon, while both he and Olson fished, Ed kept Derry in the bow of the canoe where he could not interfere again with Olson's sport, and after lunch when they embarked again Ed left his pup ashore.

"We'll be out here in the pool, old son," Ed told him. "Stick around on the bank—we won't get out of sight."

Derry whined his perplexity at this seeming desertion, but when he saw the canoe anchored his doubts vanished. After all, the dugout did not provide much scope for his activities. Here in the shallows and in the river-side woods there should be better sport. With a jaunty—almost a flippant—glance at the canoe, he started slowly along the bank until he reached the head of the pool and was just out of sight of the two fishermen. Then, beside a log which lay across the sloping bank, he stopped, thrilled by what he saw in the underwater shadows of the pool.

CHAPTER VI

FEAST TIME

THE big char—the wolf of that underwater world—could not have chosen a more deadly place from which to launch her vicious raids. The crushing weight of the dead fir log had bedded it into the break-off of the bank and into the sloping bottom. Its branches had long ago rotted away, leaving only resinous horns that caught the drifting stalks of last season's water plants and trailed them like limp banners in the current. The strongest flow was past the log's shattered end and in the backwash behind it the big Dolly Varden, the char, lay in wait at the place which all migrating fish must pass.

Like most others of his breed, Derry had inherited from his ancestors, the otter hounds, a marked fondness for the water. Of fish and the ways of fish he had much to learn and he could not know that this was the season when the sockeye salmon yearlings made their long migration seaward in answer to the mystic call of the North Pacific. He could not know that this was why the char was lurking there below him. But he did know that this fish, or one exactly like it, had almost been drawn into the canoe that morning. He

sensed that here was game—that here was hunting different from any he had known.

His shoulders trembled with excitement as he watched the spotted, long-jowled fish. He saw her rise avidly at what proved to be only a crumpled leaf whirling in the current, saw her turn sulkily and seek her hiding place. Ten minutes later when she headed upstream he turned and followed along the bank. He could not see her but, pausing frequently, he scanned the ruffled surface and once he scrambled to a bowlder to stare into the clear water beyond.

A hundred yards above the log the river was divided by a low, rocky island. Most of the flow passed on its northward side, and the bank along which Derry ran was curved to make a wide pool or slough of sluggish water. Half-way to its lower end the dog stopped and looked about him. With a perseverance new in him, he still tried to get some trace of this big fish that so attracted him.

The shore was low here, the shallows near it dotted with tule stubs and clumps of last year's water grasses. Forty yards farther on Derry saw an eddy boil to the surface. Beyond it another appeared. The char, moving slowly, was stirring the fine débris of the bottom and leaving a coiling wake as it passed. A cautious thrust of her tail sent her into an open place. She glided forward with pectoral fins spread and motionless and Derry saw her dorsal fin shear the surface like a keen knife blade.

A tiny four-footed thing left the grass stalks a yard ahead of her and began to swim frantically. It was a water vole, a mouse-like dweller of the low shore. Derry came splashing through the shallows as the char lunged, snatched down the vole and raced for deep water.

This lone huntress of the water-ways was wily. Even before the Airedale reached the spot, a bald-headed eagle left the plumed top of a spruce and swept toward the widening circles of ripples. It sailed along the course the fish had taken but by now she was in six feet of water. Derry stood with forepaw lifted and watched the strange pursuit. The eagle circled and came lower to menace him, but his lusty bark made it wary and it soared majestically to its lookout on the spruce top.

Derry splashed to shore and shook his drenched coat. Far from being disheartened by the ease with which the fish eluded him, his inexperience deceived him into thinking he had given it a close run for its life—a very close run indeed. He went a few yards farther down the shore, came to a windfall that lay out over the water and started carefully along it. Now and then he stopped with feet bunched and ears cocked questioningly to look below him for the elusive fish.

A stickleback swimming jerkily across the soft bottom caught his eye. Though Derry could see purpose in its quick movements he could not know that the plucky, four-inch fish was at work on its house-like nest.

Derry saw it tugging at a bit of weed. Its transparent little fins stopped and started with the precision of well-timed machinery as it swung and wrenched on the stalk. In many ways it was the terrier of its underwater world and the terrier on the windfall watched with interest as it moved quickly to the little house it was building against the base of a flat stone.

The house, with a round hole at both ends, was no larger than a hen's egg. The stalk was placed on its roof and then the stickleback darted to a clear place on the bottom, jammed its mouth with clean silt and carried it to the roof. Derry saw it turn partly over as it pressed the mortar into place. In a moment the sand was fastened down for on the stickleback's bony flanks was a sort of glue to be used for just this kind of work.

Derry grew restless and was about to move farther out on the windfall when he saw a sucker swimming slowly from the deeper water. He stiffened and watched again.

The sucker stopped, forced its rounded mouth against the bottom and moved its tail in measured sweeps. A cloud of mud concealed its head as it sucked and pumped water through its gills to test the bottom for food. It found nothing and came closer to the nest, leaving a cloud of dirty water hanging over the round hole it had made. Even yet it did not see the stickleback.

That little warrior, only a quarter the length of the sucker, waited with tail curved and spines erect. Like

a knight defending his castle, it prepared for the attack.

With downcast eyes the sucker blundered nearer. Once it turned as if to depart and the stickleback shifted its position to watch. Then a sprouting weed attracted the larger fish, it swam toward it, saw it was not edible and came slowly nearer the nest beside the stone.

The stickleback shot forward until he was only a foot from the tapering head. He stopped to block the way. Without waiting for signs of retreat, he charged full tilt and raked his spines along the sucker's cheek. The sucker wriggled heavily and rolled its tapering body, then turned and swam laboriously away. The stickleback followed it in short rushes as if undecided about carrying the attack farther, then it came about smartly and swam toward the nest it had so successfully defended. Derry saw it stop abruptly and immediately he too noticed the dark shape of the big char moving under the log on which he stood.

Had the oncoming char been a soft-mouthed sucker or some harmless fish no larger than himself, the valiant defender of the nest could not have come more savagely to the attack. He prepared to charge—and perish. One crunch of those strong jaws and the char would gulp it down as easily as a sockeye yearling. At that very moment the knight of the tiny castle would have been destroyed had not a wallowing splash and a wild

thrashing of legs beside the log sent the char speeding to deep water.

Derry's awkward leap into the cold river had not been deliberate. Eagerness had thrown him off his guard, he had leaned too far out, lost his balance, clawed vainly to recover it and fallen broadside directly above the nest. He came up sputtering, snorted the water from his nostrils and tried to climb the log again. But his hind feet could find no hold on its slimy underside, so with chin outthrust and legs swinging sturdily he struck out for shore.

As he waded from the shallows he was more certain than ever that it was only a matter of time until he would sink his teeth into the fish's rounded back. Compared with this, mice and cats and birds offered poor sport indeed. Yes, the river was an enthralling place.

Late that afternoon the char again lurked in the edge of the backwater at the end of the sunken log. And that afternoon also, the little sockeye salmon, encouraged by the day's sunshine, commenced their evening migration from the lake. The char's appetite had been merely whetted by the water vole. She was restless as she waited for the first schools to come, and once she left her hiding place and moved to the under-roll of the riffle above. While she was gone, Derry came back to the log to look for her. He whined guardedly as he saw her come down-stream and swing into the place where he had found her first.

The shadows of the westward trees lay long over the lake. Where the water was darkened, cool air currents wandered across the surface. The wooded draws and gullies below the northward mountain crests were filled with deep purple. Off the river mouth a loon yodelled crazily once. Then there was silence except for the river's eternal song and occasional sounds from Ed and Olson in their canoe below the bend.

Derry, motionless on the log, saw the ruffled surface above the first riffle where a school of yearlings swam in a compact, fan-shaped school. They were timid of entering the fast unknown water but the call of the far-off sea was strong. Swimming vigorously with heads upstream, they let the strong flow take them down into the pool.

The big char saw them coming and moved into the current where the solid sweep of water would give her fins and tail more power when the time came to strike. Now the school was only ten feet from her. She edged a few inches farther from her hiding place, seeming a dull shadow on the darker bottom. Then, with vicious speed, she struck!

The surface was shattered as if a small explosion had taken place just under it. But already the char was back in her lair and Derry saw the glint of her victim's silver side as she crushed it, spat it out, then caught it in one last, greedy gulp.

Derry stirred impatiently but he was in the shadow now and hidden from the fish. He edged along the

sloping log until the water flowed around his forepaws. Then on the shore to his left he saw a small dark form standing with arched back and eager, uplifted head. It too had seen the splash of the char's rush and now it slipped into the water and dived, leaving only a brief ripple to mark the place where it went down.

The next school of yearlings was almost within striking distance and the spotted raider was moving into the current again when the mink hurtled down on her. She floundered sideways as the mink's fangs met through the tough skin of her back. She tried to flee down the pool. Derry whined and felt his way farther out on the log until the water swirled against his shoulders.

The char was matched with a swimmer that, in close quarters, was her master. As a cougar rides the back of a deer it is dragging down, so the mink rode this fish whose weight and length were greater than its own. One front paw reached into the gills and its sharp tusks sank into the flesh close behind the head where the spine was near the skin.

The char tried to shake her enemy but it overbalanced her. She whirled in erratic circles, rolled to her side and her widespread tail found the bottom to throw her up in short, uneven jumps. The current swept them nearer shore and there Derry saw the water clouded with silt as the grim struggle reached its climax.

The mink's teeth went deeper. They closed over the

spine, crunched through, and the stricken fish spun over and over, then with a final spasmodic kick, lay still. Derry watched the mink come backwards from the water with back humped and forelegs straight as it hauled its prize to land. Then he growled and ran along the bank. Here at last was the fish he had been seeking all that afternoon.

But the fierce little under-water hunter warned him to stand back. It released the fish, stretched its neck, snarled and threatened him with angry, chittering sounds. Derry answered with a ringing bark. The mink turned to renew its hold on the char and Derry dodged closer. The mink whirled and faced him with bared fangs.

In times of famine the mink had attacked animals as large as this noisy creature on the bank. But now, with a feast within its grasp, it was on the defensive. The young Airedale continued its barking and leaped from side to side. Ed heard his signals and answered with a shout.

But the mink would not have yielded ground had he not heard the plunge and splash of paddles and seen the canoe come speeding up along the bank. He snarled, pounced toward Derry and then, seeing the dugout and the two men outlined against the pale light of the sky, he retreated, paused, dived hurriedly. When Ed and Olson reached him Derry was dragging the big fish up the sloping bank.

CHAPTER VII

TERRIER TROUBLE

Colonel Dempster's parrot had disappeared. They merely had let it out of its cage that morning to take its usual walk along the veranda railing and when they came to look for it again it had gone. It had been in the family for forty years and never once had it even attempted to run away. Besides, its wings were clipped. Elderly Mrs. Dempster had gone about the yard, through the shrubbery and everywhere waving her apron and crying "Pol-leh!" in her high contralto. Colonel Dempster had marched about glaring under hedges and into trees commanding Polly in his best military voice to return to barracks without delay. But Polly had not returned.

By ten o'clock neighbors on both sides of the street had heard again, with none of the familiar details omitted by the questing Mrs. Dempster, how the Colonel had bought the bird soon after he went to serve in the Tropics, of what pains he had taken to educate it and how keenly he felt its loss. The neighbors received the news with varying degrees of sympathy. Some were sorry, some, like Miss Morris, were secretly a little relieved that this noisy bird would disturb the quiet of Balsam Street no longer. They went back to

their household duties but before noon the rumor had spread that Mrs. Dempster suspected that Derry had been the means of its destruction and that the Colonel was positive about it. No one could be so positive about anything as the Colonel.

Yes, that rascal of an Airedale had killed poor Polly, and so at half-past twelve when Ed and Derry came home to dinner the Colonel was on the sidewalk to waylay them, with his mustaches waxed ferociously, his panama hat pulled down truculently and blood in his eye.

As the pair came jauntily along Balsam Street they seemed in no way like principal and accomplice in so dastardly an outrage as the destruction of a pet the Colonel had cherished for forty years. Ed was whistling and Derry, who preceded him, had one carefree eye on the hedge for possible squirrels, the other on the road for sparrows that needed stirring up.

By the time they were half-way down the block Ed saw that the Colonel was waiting for him. Derry trotted forward to have his daily exchange of badinage with the brightly-colored bird that usually teetered on its perch with a beady eye on the lookout for him. To unsympathetic human ears their meetings meant only squawks and blatant yappings, but for Derry the shrill "Up, Guards, and at 'em! Pukka, pukka, yessir! Pop! Pop! Pop!" that was launched at him was a pleasing bit of humor. Derry liked humor. He was something of a humorist himself.

But to-day instead of the parrot's jeers he heard the Colonel addressing his master with unquestionable severity.

"Look here, Sibley. My parrot's gone and that rascal's responsible." When the Colonel said "rascal" he pointed an ominous blackthorn stick straight at Derry's head.

Derry sidled warily out of reach and eyed the red-faced man with tolerant amusement. The Colonel, he knew, was of uncertain temper. A number of trifling incidents concerning his harmless burrowings in the soft earth of tulip beds, certain unsavory bones he had left on the Dempster lawn for the Colonel to play with if he so desired, had proved that to him. Still it so happened that his conscience was clear to-day, he and the Colonel were quits, he had not so much as poked his inquiring nose inside the Colonel's gate for days.

"How you figure that?" Ed asked. "The pup was with me all morning, wasn't away from the garage for more than ten minutes. I guess you're mistaken."

As Derry watched the Colonel he saw him become more angry. The dog's lower jaw dropped and his ears came up in an expression of drollery. Eyeing the stick, he circled and edged closer to the back of the man's legs, but the stick swished and he heard a snapping, "Get out of that, you blackguard." The Colonel's tone interested Derry greatly.

"That alibi won't do, m'boy. That scatter-brained terrier's responsible and as soon as I can prove it I'll

make it hot for both of you—dashed hot. Come to think of it, the dog's had his eye on my bird for days. Haven't I seen him barking at it, fairly watering at the mouth to get it. Not a word, sir. I'll make a search, I'll get the evidence—then somebody'll suffer, I warrant you. Why—" He was raising his voice angrily when Derry quite rudely interrupted with a loud bark which sounded suspiciously like "Blah!"

The Colonel wheeled savagely and Derry cavorted with delight at the interesting turn things were taking. Numerous times that morning he had tried to stir up a little fun. He had trotted up and down Main Street with an old boot dangling from his mouth in a futile attempt to induce some other dog into a game of tug-of-war. He had searched in vain for lively squirrels and now when it seemed that the entire morning was to be wasted he ran into this surprising bit of luck. Not many dogs would have a real live colonel to play with. Derry spread his forelegs, placed his chin on the ground and yapped an invitation for the Colonel to make the first move.

But the Colonel merely glared and sputtered. "T-t-take him out of my sight, I tell you," he finally blurted out. "If I lay hands on him I'll—I'll—" But the sight of the grinning dog was too much and he became inarticulate again.

Ed saw there was no use trying to make the Colonel listen to reason as long as he was in such a towering rage. "You'll find your blooming bird," he parried.

Then as a parting shot he added, "I bet it's a tough mouthful for any dog." He called Derry and started on but as he slammed his own gate behind him he saw the Colonel still standing where they had left him. Derry also saw him and gave a parting, almost a regretful "yawp!" He was disappointed at having to leave for by all the signs he knew the Colonel could have given him an hilarious hour. But the Colonel only shook his blackthorn and stamped up the walk to his own door.

When he was in the house Ed thought of a dozen cutting things he could have said and over his dinner he relieved himself of some of them.

"The crazy old nut," he told his aunt, "he wouldn't listen to a word I said. What good is it but to pop corks and gabble at everybody that goes past?"

"There now, Edward. I understand how you feel and the Colonel certainly is hard to get on with when he's annoyed but, after all, he was greatly attached to Polly."

"Polly! Bah! Blooming old squawker."

"Quite," his aunt said. She had feared Ed would say something rude to the old gentleman. The Dempsters were new people in town, had only lived there a few months. They had found that city life made too great demands on their modest pension and, being fond of hunting and fishing, a little town like Twin Forks suited the Colonel very well. Yes, she was certainly glad Ed hadn't lost his temper.

"You don't suppose Derry could really have chased it, do you?" she went on.

"How could he? I'm pretty certain he wasn't off Main Street all morning. The bird'll turn up all right. It's forty years old—should know its way 'round by this time. Forty years! Say, if I'd had to live with that for forty years I'd be crabby too. I bet right now its snickering at them from a tree or something."

"I hope so," his aunt rejoined half-heartedly as she passed him his pie.

As Ed finished his meal he asked himself again if Derry could possibly have been near the parrot that morning. True, he had not been out of sight for long at a time but the pup was never still, he was here, there and all over the lot. Even so, he could hardly have come as far from the garage as Balsam Street and had time to kill a parrot without being missed. Of course the Colonel was wrong. Maybe some cat had got his bird. However, to be on the safe side, he would leave the dog confined to the yard that afternoon. He did not want any more aggravating encounters with the Colonel.

Ten minutes later Derry was grieved to find the gate shut against him. He followed along the inside of the picket fence, keeping abreast of his master, barking at him to tell him he had forgotten something, something important, to wit, his dog Derry. But Ed did not heed him and all too soon the corner of the fence prevented his going farther. He contented himself with

wedging his black nose between the pickets and watching his master until he turned the corner. Then, being a dog who took the bitter with the sweet, he ambled across the garden to seek some patch of warm earth where he could take his noontime snooze. He throw himself down in a soft hollow between the potato hills, sighed heavily and tried to sleep.

But sleep would not come to him. A large black ant scaled his foreleg and as it went exploring across his paw its fumbling legs tickled him. Up came his head and he glared at it, astounded by its audacity, but his long, hard stare had no terrors for the busy ant. As the tickling increased he pushed it unceremoniously off his leg with his nose and when he saw it toiling up a tiny depression in the dusty ground he brought a foreleg down, spank! Then he crooked his paw and, raising it slightly, peered intently, expecting to find under it nothing but the mangled remains of his tormentor. He was surprised to see it was uninjured.

He sprang to his feet. "Huh!" he grunted and started to prod it first with one paw, then with the other. Even that did not get results and soon he was digging and scraping until in his eagerness he had uncovered half a hill of potatoes and had hidden the ant in the earth he scattered.

He tried to cover his error by a great show of alertness, turning his head sharply this way and that, looking at the house windows and at the street with what he thought was remarkable sagacity. When a bee

bumbled past him he leaped savagely at it. Unfortunately for him, he succeeded in imprisoning the bee inside his lip. He sprang back as if a gun had been fired before his nose, sneezed violently and shot the bee from his mouth and then stood staring at it ruefully. None of these stupid flying and crawling things could take a joke. He stalked loftily from the garden. He would lie in the shade of the lilacs.

On his way to that cool retreat he brushed carelessly through the shrubs lining the fence and to his surprise found a loose picket. Carefully examining the windows behind him, he forced his way through. It was a tight squeeze but he had made it and for the rest of the afternoon he was free, a rover with no human to supervise his doings. Fancy trying to confine him like a mere puppy! He was about to yap his scorn of such things as fences but, glancing back at the house, he remembered himself in time. Keeping discreetly close to the hedge, he trotted airily toward the center of the town.

As he reached the first corner a sudden gust of wind swept out of the side street, and beyond it he saw the Colonel marching home from the post-office, where he had been to put up a notice offering a reward for the missing Polly.

"See who's here!" grinned Derry. He trotted forward, seemingly ignorant of the Colonel's approach, but nevertheless watching him from the corner of his eye. Perhaps the old lad would feel more like a romp

now that he had had his dinner. A fellow never knew his luck.

And until that moment Derry had no idea of how great his luck would be, for just then an unexpected gust swept the Colonel's panama from his head and rolled it into the middle of the road.

The Colonel made a dignified attempt to recover it but as his fingers were about to close on it a following gust took it ten feet from him and at that instant, in a flash of positive genius, Derry saw the possibilities of the incident. The Colonel and a runaway panama! For what more could a dog ask? "Whoopee!" he yapped and bounded down the road.

When Colonel Dempster saw that confounded Sibley Airedale making for his hat he stiffened with astonishment. That was a mistake, for it gave Derry time to reach the hat ahead of him. With a great show of innocence he waited for the Colonel as if he intended to politely return the hat. Even the Colonel was hoodwinked into thinking so and overlooked the imps of fun which were dancing in the pup's brown eyes. Just as the hand came down Derry pranced aside, apparently still waiting to return the hat.

"Confound you, drop it," the Colonel ordered testily.

Derry became tremendously interested in the topmost branch of a maple across the street. He gazed fixedly up as if he had discovered on it some strange bird, perhaps even the missing parrot.

The Colonel thought his chance had come but as he stepped forward Derry, without looking at him, decided he had to trot twenty feet farther to get a better look at whatever it was he found so enthralling in the tree-top.

"Give me that hat. Drop it at once, blast you," the Colonel rasped.

Derry turned, trying his best to seem mildly surprised. Things were looking promising, very promising indeed.

"Get out!" shouted the Colonel, lunging with his stick.

"Get out yourself," Derry's bark said as he dodged and stood with his head cocked waiting for the next move.

The Colonel's next move was a mistake, a serious one. He shouted and rushed the pup, who crouched, ducked the clumsy kick, then swerved and raced half a block along the side street.

"You thieving blackguard!" the Colonel bellowed, in his colossal anger quite forgetting his dignity.

"Yap! Yap-yap!" retorted Derry. He saw the Colonel was uncertain whether or not to follow him. He must be induced to follow, for it would be a shame to have the game stop before it had well commenced. So he dropped the hat nonchalantly and went to the sidewalk, where he devoted his entire attention to a troublesome but quite imaginary flea behind his ear.

The Colonel, though well schooled in the tactics of

skirmishing for aborigines, knew little about those equally subtle tactics of skirmishing with terriers. Seeing his hat apparently forgotten he marched openly toward it. Nearer and nearer he came, while Derry rushed back and forth along the hedge as if his whole life depended on finding a wren there. Now here, now there he pranced, but each crafty leap took him closer to the hat and when the Colonel was within a yard of it he flew into the road like a swallow, snatched the hat and raced up the street, hilarious with delight at the success of his ruse.

Had the Colonel been a sensible man, a man who gave due thought to his health, he would have turned his back and gone home to cool off on his veranda. It was a well-known fact that his liver was not good and that he must not exert himself violently. But "Do-or-Die" Dempster—the name he had won on the frontiers—was not the man to submit to fate and the whims of a terrier. More than anything else in life, except the recovery of his lamented parrot, he wanted to lay his hands on that dog. And that was precisely what Derry did not intend to let him do. He turned the corner into Main Street and the Colonel, quite beside himself with rage, came after him.

Strange words seeped through the Colonel's drawn lips. Derry was delighted and trotted back to give him a good look at the hat. The Colonel blinked. He did not scream, nor was it a shout, but an impotent, rattling sound straggled from his parched throat as

he dashed at his tormentor. "Hoo-ray!" yodelled Derry as he caught up the hat and galloped away.

Loungers at the hotel and general store turned, wondering what was up, as they saw the Colonel, now flame-faced and pop-eyed, vainly trying to overtake a dog who carried what was unmistakably the Colonel's panama and who paused frequently to worry it until the chase became warm. They grinned and encouraged the Colonel by shouts and gestures.

Half-way along Main Street Derry swerved into a lane which led downhill to the alder woods between the town and the railroad tracks. On the down grade the Colonel gained a little but he knew he could not last much longer for his lungs were bursting. But Derry was by no means ready to call off the sport. He cut through a patch of devil-clubs and found an overgrown cow path, where he paused, dropped the hat and waited with lolling tongue for his pursuer to appear.

He heard him crash through the devil-club thicket and was about to pick up the hat and continue on his merry way when from a small opening close ahead he heard a voice which was strangely familiar. Derry gave one fleeting glance backward, saw there was time to investigate and still beat the Colonel to the hat, and plunged into the opening.

As he did so he heard that well-remembered voice again. This time it was unmistakable, and from the

tall grass whence it came he saw the lifted head of a large, half-wild cat.

Derry paused with a forepaw lifted. He could hear the Colonel's feet on the trail but ahead of him was a matter of more importance than panamas. His brief indecision vanished as the voice came to him again. "Up, Guards, and at 'em! Yessir, yessir! Pop!—" The familiar jargon ended in a squawk of terror as the cat turned again to the prostrate Polly. The Colonel coming into the clearing saw the ghastly fate which waited for his pet, but he came too late to intervene. He tried to shout, but his breath failed him and at the moment Derry charged the snarling cat, yipped as its claws raked his cheek and valiantly turned to charge again. The cat bounded aside and gained the nearest tree with the aggressive terrier close behind it.

The Colonel managed to gasp "Polly!" as he sank to the grass, picked up his pet and saw that, except for a missing tuft of feathers pulled out by the cat's first murderous spring, it was unharmed. It was then that Derry did the first really sensible thing to his credit that afternoon—he quietly and discreetly withdrew.

That evening when Ed came up Balsam Street he saw Colonel Dempster again awaiting him. "He's all set to rave some more," Ed thought. But he was quite mistaken.

"Aw—er, about that terrier of yours, Sibley," the old man began. "Not so black as I painted him, I find,

not nearly so black. Dashed aggravating of course—very much so—was ready to slay him a few hours ago, but er—" Gruffly he shoved a paper parcel at Ed. "Chops. Give 'em to him—my compliments—hrummph!" Ed thought the Colonel seemed a trifle lame as he returned to his house.

Half an hour later over his supper Ed said to his aunt, "Old Dempster's not such a bad old guy. Guess his bark's worse'n his bite."

Outside the screen door Derry was making strange facial contortions as he tried to salvage the marrow from the bone of his third chop. As he licked his lips a shrill "Up, Guards, and at 'em," came from across the peaceful street, but Derry declined to answer. He sprawled on the mat and sighed, content at having made the day a good one after all.

CHAPTER VIII

UNHEEDED WARNING

"WELL, are y' satisfied you got your money's worth in him?" old Sandy Hoskins asked Ed one morning at the Comet, nodding toward the young Airedale who sat on the planking outside the door eagerly watching a pair of barn swallows at work on a nest under the eaves.

"Best pup in the valley," Ed grinned.

"He's good, all right—mighty good stuff there. Now the novelty's worn off, sorta, seems to me it's time you got down to business with him, though.

"Listen, Ed," he went on quickly, seeing the changed expression on the lean face of his helper. "I'm saying this for yer own good—yours and the pup's. Some of the bunch around here are sure you'll spoil him if you don't change yer ways. I'd hate to have them be able to chirp that I-told-you-so stuff."

"He's mine, ain't he?" Ed asked sullenly. "I don't mean that gives me a right to spoil him, but what ain't I doing right?"

"For one thing, it isn't doing him any good to be down here with you all the time. Hardly a day but he isn't roaming with the bunch of *cultus* dogs hanging round the street. They won't help him any."

"Mebbe not."

"No mebbe about it, Ed. That's how tramp dogs are made."

"These guys that're all the time bossin' their dogs give me a pain in the neck," Ed retorted. "They keep 'em shut up at home most of the time and when they take 'em out the dog dasn't look cross-eyed or they jump him. That 'kind but firm' line makes me sick."

"Sure, I know. But you got to—"

"I want my pup to have a good time. This business of keeping a dog chained up and only letting him loose when he works for you, then chaining him again until you need him next time—that don't strike me as shootin' square. A dog like Derry, that's just rarin' to go—why, keeping him locked up would either break his spirit or make him run away."

"You're talkin' sense there. But you know yourself that when you bring him down to work you haven't the time to keep tabs on him. Everybody's chummin' up with him, foolin' with him an' doing their level best to spoil him."

"They'll never spoil *him*," Ed persisted. He would have said more but at that moment Neal, a rancher from up river, came into the garage and Ed was left alone at the work bench.

He would have liked to make Hoskins understand about Derry, in his inarticulate way to have shown him what he expected from this terrier, who, once the sum-

mer work at the garage was ended, he intended to take with him during a lonely winter far back in the hills. But even could he have found words, Ed Sibley was not the sort of youth to tell his secret hopes and desires to even so sympathetic a person as old Hoskins. Like most men whose time has been largely spent in the wilderness, Ed detested any display of sentiment, and yet, like most of his kind, he had his sentimental side. To have in this high-spirited terrier a partner on those distant trails—not to make him into a docile slave—this was what he longed for. What if the Airedale did sometimes transgress in trifling matters? Wasn't it better to keep his joyousness of spirit, his gay recklessness, than risk killing it only to gain a sullen, unloving obedience?

Of course Derry must be disciplined. Ed never doubted that, but Olson, the old ferryman, and some of these others, seemed to take a grim delight in making their dogs do things just to show their authority. "I'll let the pup see I'm boss," Ed thought, "but I don't aim to be everlastingly making him jump through the hoop just to prove it."

Often since the day of Derry's arrival, he had pondered on the words of the stranger who rode with him in the truck from the station. Was his dog going to prove to be nothing but a show dog? Personally Ed had little use for any dog, no matter how finely bred, that lacked intelligence and initiative. "I'd sooner

have any wise old mongrel," he had said more than once, "than a show dog with nothing above the ears but bone."

But as the days became weeks his apprehension vanished. Even though there was much in Derry's make-up of which he had still to learn, he saw that Derry was quick to understand. The ease with which he had learned that trick with his plate proved that.

Derry came to him with a habit which was amusing at first, but which soon became annoying. Often when he had been fed the terrier would stroll off and come back to see if he could not salvage a last scrap from his plate. When he could not, he would push it ahead of him with his forepaws, prod it with his nose and finally, by standing on the rim, tilt it so he could seize it in his teeth. Then with an air of the utmost secrecy he would trot off among the berry bushes and leave it there. Coming out of the shrubbery, he would glance covertly about him as if trying to outwit some person or animal he liked to pretend was spying on him.

Ed had laughed at this stealthy burlesque the first few times but soon, when he had to spend five or ten minutes in search of the missing tinware before he could feed his dog, he found no amusement in the game. He set out to teach Derry to bring his plate to the back door and after not more than an hour's effort he made the pup understand what was wanted. By leading him to the hiding place, putting the plate in his mouth and bringing him to the back door and by re-

peating the command to "Bring it here" over and over, he showed Derry what was wanted. And once he knew, Derry obeyed willingly enough.

"The pup's got savvy—you bet he has," he told his aunt admiringly. Why, wouldn't he already do simple retrieving? Ed could toss a chicken wing out across the lawn and the dog would get it and come prancing back. He had even once waded into shallow water to his neck in order to recover a chip which Ed had thrown. Olson and the others with their elaborate methods of training—their grim insistence on obedience in every detail—that might be all right for spaniels, but it didn't go down with the terrier. Nor did Ed particularly want it to. His dog had a will of his own, but in the essential things it seemed to Ed that Derry would give him little trouble. More than once he was tempted to indulge in a little honest boasting about this pedigreed Dalmadge dog of his. But Olson was a hard man to convince—and then on that momentous day at the river when Derry first showed his sterling worth, Olson had it proved to him in a way more convincing than words could ever be.

CHAPTER IX

HELL'S KETTLE

A FEW days after his talk with Hoskins Ed Sibley and Derry were footing it briskly down the river road on their way from Twin Forks to the ferry landing. Derry's high spirits and Ed's lusty though none too musical whistle suggested they were going to some favorite hunting ground instead of taking a tramp to install new piston rings in a pump engine at a ranch across the river. It was indeed a prosaic errand but on such a zestful day anything was better than work within the drab walls of the garage.

From roadside ditches came the drawling "c-r-rawk" of frogs a-sprawl in the May sunshine; bursting buds clouded the tops of the alders in a haze of delicate green; and the growling chorus of the river's wild freshet told of the spring's swift advance. Over both youth and dog had been cast the spell of this perfect day. Because of it Derry's pranks became waggish—droll—utterly absurd, and not even the prospect of a meeting with old Bert Olson, the argumentative ferryman, could rob Ed's whistle of its blitheness.

When they were a mile below the settlement they heard a willow grouse drumming in some hiding place among the thickset alder clumps. The sound pro-

voked Derry to extravagant gestures of alertness. He cocked his ears, scanned the bushes with a tremendously knowing eye, then leaped the ditch and rammed his way into the thicket with a loud "yawp" which he intended to be a compelling invitation for Ed to follow him, but which had a hollow heartiness that meant he had not the foggiest notion where the drumming grouse was hiding.

"Old stuff," Ed derided, and Derry looked out of the brush with grinning mouth and lolling tongue to admit he had been indulging in a colossal bluff.

To cover his confusion he commenced to dig out a purely imaginary rat. He snuffled and snorted, hurled clods of leaf mold into the road, tried to give a realistic portrayal of a remarkably spry young terrier about to capture a most elusive rat. But Ed merely paused in his whistling long enough to advise him to "tell it to the marines" and marched on down the road.

"Blah!" Derry barked in disgust. He picked up a stick twice as long as himself and cantered ahead to show he had found something worth while in that hole after all. But even in his moment of greatest elation luck was most unkind for, as he was trying to pass between two trees with the stick crossways in his mouth, it jammed and hurled him down so violently that he had scarcely time to grunt his surprise before he was somersaulted into a puddle of soggy leaves.

"Closed you up like a concertina," Ed chuckled. At which Derry yawned with laborious indifference before

trotting ahead to find a grassy spot where he could roll and clean his spattered coat.

At the next turn the road came out on the river bank and Ed stopped to watch the great swirling stream. Like all dwellers in the valley, he had a wholesome respect for the river, but Derry, to show how little he cared for such awesome sights as spring freshets, swaggered to the very edge of the perilous cut-bank and contemptuously regarded the silt-laden water snarling over the bowlders twenty feet below him.

"Come here, you," Ed commanded. "Don't get gay with that old river. Anything that goes in there, stays in—for keeps."

Derry turned his head toward his master, looked at him with much the same lofty amusement as a duckling, new come to the farmyard pond, must have for the warning squawks of the hen that hatched it. But Ed insisted he stand clear of the crumbling bank. For in that country of untamed rivers and among the white-water men who traveled them, this great stream had a reputation more notorious than any inland water between Vancouver and Nome, and along its entire course there was no place so evil as Hell's Kettle, a short canyon five miles below the ferry landing.

They started on and soon neared the ferry's cable tower. At the landing a short length of steel rail suspended by a wire served as a gong and Ed pounded on it to call Olson from his shanty on the distant bank.

Derry, not satisfied with the gong, added his bark to the ringing summons.

"Soft pedal," Ed warned. "Maybe he's cooled down since you made him lose that fish a week ago." He saw Olson come from his shanty and walk aboard the cable ferry.

As Ed watched him ease the awkward craft into the full snap of the current a feeling of sympathy and tolerance for the lonely, embittered old man stirred him. In his day—the departed day of steamboats—Olson had been a figure of importance in the North. Old-timers said that when Bert couldn't get a stern-wheeler up the lashing waters of a riffle or through a canyon no one else need try. In his proud day he had had no peer as a river man but now, since the coming of the railroad, the last of the paddle-wheelers was rotting on the mud flats at the river mouth and the man who had once piloted them was forced to swallow his pride and spend his declining years as a mere tender of a government ferry. "Guess it'd make a crab of anybody," Ed mused, his eyes on the thickset man at the wheel of the chunky craft bucking the rips and eddies in midstream.

In spite of its ungainly appearance, the ferry's two dory-like pontoons, with the twenty feet of decking between them, offered little resistance to the hard-driving water. On the cable suspended between the wooden towers was a traveling block and through its

lower half a long wire rope ran into smaller blocks set on the upstream wings of the ferry. By turning the wheel and shortening one side of this stout bridle, Olson could hold the pontoons at an angle to the current so that they side-slipped across in a surprisingly short time.

The keen black bows shearing the water and the tautness of the main cable told of the stream's tremendous power, but Olson held the wheel hard over as if his thirty years' mastery of the river had made him contemptuous of its might. "He's sure crowding her," Ed thought. "Y'd think he couldn't get here fast enough to suit him." The cable hummed, the water ripped past the tarred flanks of the pontoons, and the moment the ferry bumped the landing apron Ed stepped aboard, but Derry—who had chosen that very moment to bark defiance at an abusive jay—had his back to the river and did not realize the possibility of being left behind.

"Is he comin'—or ain't he?" Olson demanded, and before Ed could assure him crisply that Derry was most certainly coming, he spun the wheel and swung the noses of the pontoons into the current. The Airedale came charging across the landing but by that time eight feet of roiled water lay between him and the ferry that was bearing his master away. He crouched and would have attempted to jump had not Ed shouted to prevent him.

"Can't wait all day for him," Olson grunted.

"What's the big idea?" Ed demanded crisply. But

the answer was never given, for with a startled exclamation Olson threw the wheel over, working desperately to avoid collision with a huge stump a boiling eddy had brought to surface directly in front of the bow of the offshore pontoon. Ed had only time to clutch the rail before the impact threw him to his knees. Every timber groaned with the strain and then the roots, like the tentacles of an octopus, wrapped themselves over the bow and tons of water banked behind the sprawling tangle of stump and multiplied its crushing force.

"Grab the pike-pole!" Olson bellowed, trying to swing the ferry and free it of the increasing strain. Water surged across the deck, the main cable was bar-taut, the bridle twanged like a bowstring, the ferry wallowed sickeningly. Ed leaped over the rail and, standing close to the stump with the smother of foam to his hips, tried to get some leverage against the gripping roots.

During each of those few tortured seconds while the two men struggled, the river, like a vindictive beast which at last has turned to annihilate its captors, threw itself higher over the bow—and then with ghastly abruptness the main cable parted, the traveling block dropped with a choked splash and the ferry started down-stream, turning crazily end for end.

Ed saw the stump flounder out of sight as an eddy sucked it down. He heard quick barks of alarm from Derry, saw him race along the bank to keep abreast

of them. The vibrant tones of that bark he understood so well told him the dog knew the danger and there flashed through Ed's mind a sharp sensation of relief that Derry at least would escape the fate that must claim them.

Five miles down-stream death waited. Hell's Kettle would be seething to-day; everything that entered its vortex would come to the surface—if it ever came up —as matchwood. Ed had seen stout trees sucked down and, though he had often watched, nothing but short lengths and splinters ever appeared. The ferry would be crushed like a berry box!

And now the river was hurrying them to that bottleneck between sloping rock walls where the Kettle waited for its prey. To keep abreast of them Derry had to leap windfalls, splash across the flooded mouths of sloughs, in places swim them, but desperately he charged onward to keep them within sight as if his master's life depended on that alone.

Ed waved to him and the salute had all the poignancy of farewell. Derry responded with one quick bark; then for a moment he was hidden by the bushes fringing the raw bank.

Ed turned in time to see the ex-steamboat man, his back against the now useless wheel, draw his big silver watch from the pocket of his soiled buckskin vest, study its dial, then drop it into the pocket again. "Twenty-five minutes and we'll be into the Kettle," he

remarked casually and spat into the river—the river that had overpowered him after thirty years of mastery.

The inevitableness, the cold certainty of things, was more than Ed could stand. At least twice before, his active outdoor life had brought him face to face with death, but then there was a chance to do something, a chance to fight, while now they could do nothing during those twenty-five minutes except that which in times of danger is hardest of all—there seemed nothing to do but wait.

"Sooner'n ride into the Kettle, I'll try to swim it—" he began.

"Y'know how fer y'll get. You seen that stump dragged down."

"Meller? What about him? His cabin's close above the Kettle. Suppose he saw us and—"

"Suppose we had wings, son," Olson said, not unkindly. "Nope, we're fer it. I slipped up this once. Shoulda towed a skiff to-day. Was going to launch it when I heard that dog yappin'. That kinda riled me an' I didn't wait. Oh, I ain't blamin' him fer this. Ferget it."

He may have said more but Ed did not hear him for, looking across the hundred yards of hurrying, glacial water toward the black-and-tan body weaving its way in and out of the willows, he conceived a wild, impossible idea. It was absurd to think that Derry

could—but no plan was too absurd to be attempted now . . . the Kettle . . . twenty minutes more . . . after that! Ed sprang to action.

With Derry—this dog he was only beginning to know—lay their only slim chance of salvation, and on the deck of the derelict that the river was sweeping along Ed stood up, waved his arm, motioned to the road and shouted, "Mush!"

"Save yer wind," Olson advised, but Ed ignored him. His body, his voice, every fiber of his being was concentrated on the forlorn effort of making Derry understand about the short cut down the road to Meller's cabin.

He saw the dog outlined against the soft green of the willows, knew by the way he ran up and down the bank that he was puzzled. But over and over again Ed shouted and waved his arm in the direction of the road. The ferry was turning slowly end for end and as it turned Ed kept moving to the edge nearest Derry, kept pointing insistently toward the road that led straight through the woods around which the river swept in a mile-long arc. And as they swung into the bend he saw Derry hurl himself into the willows, saw their tips sway to mark his plunges, and heard the sound of barking from the road.

"He's off!" Ed shouted.

"Off after a rabbit most like. Dogs ain't mind readers. An' allowin' he was, he couldn't get there fast enough. We on'y got fifteen minutes more. Nice day

fer a bathin' party." It was the first jest Ed had ever heard the old man attempt. In spite of the hope he would not let himself abandon, he knew he would probably never see his dog again.

The water grew rougher on that mile of curve. Outcroppings of rock along the shores sent curling waves angling outward to meet in midstream in spearheads of foam and these prevented any remote chance of the ferry's being swept close to the steep bank. The pontoons circled one another, the deck rose and fell unevenly, the cross timbers and stringers creaked with the strain.

But never did Ed cease watching the bank. A dozen times he fancied he saw the brush move and each time he steeled himself for the sight of Derry; a dozen times he thought he heard barking far back in the woods—the sharp barks of a terrier hot on a rabbit trail. Then before he knew it, they were into the straight run of river where the water quickened relentlessly to plunge over the brink of the Kettle.

Beyond the brink they saw where the water spouted against the wall of drenched rock below and on their left, close above the Kettle, they saw the weathered shakes of Meller's cabin roof. They could even see the stovepipe and in vain they looked for some telltale wisp of smoke to show that Meller was at home. Nowhere, neither along the broken bank nor on the eddies near the shore, was there any sign of dog or man.

Derry had failed to understand!

The ferry rode evenly now. As if the river had tired of toying with its prey, it set straight and strong for the entrance to the Kettle. Ed's fingers fumbled with his boot laces. He freed his feet, pulled his sweater over his head, and threw it down. Olson, watching, shook his head.

They were only a half mile from the Kettle now, and from its roaring vortex they saw a big cedar rear slowly upward with water streaming from its shaggy bark, saw it gyrate crazily, stand almost vertical with two-thirds of its length above the surface and then, still wobbling, start to sink into the thundering core of the whirlpool. The sun glinted on its forked top and then it was taken completely under.

Ed's bare feet thudded on the planking as he ran to the upstream end of the deck. For an instant he poised above the numbing, glacial water. "I'll go out fighting," he shouted as his arms came up above his head. He leaned outward, threw back his arms and was on the verge of plunging when Olson roared "Steady!" in a voice which in days gone by had frozen more than one deckhand to immobility. As Ed turned and caught the rail he heard from the shore an answering bark, a bark that was unbelievably like the bark of Derry—the dog he thought had failed. But it was not until he heard Olson say, between clenched teeth, "It's a fifty-fifty chance," that he saw Meller's poling boat come from a narrow eddy under the overhanging branches and shoot out to intercept them.

Meller was a brave man but the river was not cheated yet. A current setting strongly toward the farther side, one that was in fact the trailing edge of the great whirl, carried them across stream. The old veteran of the river was muttering, "He should go back—he can't buck the rip," but still Meller careened after them.

He was close now . . . He was spinning the boat's nose up into the eye of the current . . . Now they were tumbling into it, seizing paddles, trying to work the overloaded craft against the water that swept into the river's great cauldron. The roar of the tortured water was close at their backs. Ed in the bow, naked to the waist, threw his body onto the paddle with every stroke. Up—down—back, his arms worked as his blade bit into the slipping water. Nobody spoke; there was only the roar of the river behind and from the shore, as if defying it, as if urging them to one supreme effort, came the staccato barks of Derry.

They fought—but they could not gain, though Ed was sure now they were holding their own. Meller turned the boat a few degrees toward the shore. Ed slashed his paddle overhead and plunged it into the water to keep them from being swung broadside over the brink. They seemed to be coming nearer to shore; Derry's barks came more loudly to his ears; but with each snapping stroke Ed's head came down and he dared not risk even a fleeting glance shoreward. "Now! Horse it to 'er now!" Olson panted and with that

rallying shout Derry barked again and Ed could feel the boat gaining slowly . . . Now they were ranging close to the sloping wall of loose rock . . . Now they bumped, Ed's fingers found a fissure and held grimly, and now they were ashore and Derry was leaping on Ed, clawing his bare shoulders in the madness of his joy.

While Ed held his young terrier close in his arms, as if he would never let him go, dare-devil Meller told how the dog had come running along the road where it rejoined the river.

"He sure was all het up about something. I could see that," he told them. "First he tore right past me, barkin' like two-of-a-kind. Then all of a sudden he put on the brakes and come back—still barkin'. I said something to him, and he whined and crashed into the brush. It was only a few yards to the river bank and I went after him, wondering what was up. When I got there he was looking up stream and then he gave me a stare like he was askin' 'What you going to do about it?'

"You were just in sight on the bend then an'—well you know the rest."

None of them saw the ferry sucked under, but from the top of the bank the old steamboat man pointed to a few pitched pontoon planks the whirl had spewed into the rapids below. He said no word at sight of this wreckage of his ferry but as he turned away Ed heard

him say something that made his arms close more tightly round his dog.

"Wish't I had a dog like that Derry—fer myself, I mean," Olson said, and only Ed Sibley knew what worlds of feeling those few gruff words implied.

CHAPTER X

THE SPARK OF DEATH

NORTHLAND summer is too fleet and glorious a season to be meted out in man-imposed measurements of weeks and days. There is in it a subtle sense of movement, of something desirable passing swiftly by; the long days follow one another closely with only a few shadowed hours between. Ed Sibley, in duty bound to work with Hoskins in the garage until the autumn came, found the confinement irksome. For him the garage was a sluggish backwater which held him while the splendid weeks of July drifted all too quickly past.

In other summers he had found employment with road gangs or among the crews of workers sent out to repair the government trails or to push new ones farther into the vast, uncharted valleys. Once years ago he had served as deckhand on a river steamboat. Any such work suited him. He felt himself a sharer in the vital activity of the country, but this summer, spent mostly at a grimy mechanic's bench, seemed to him like a self-imposed imprisonment. So, when August came and there was no work for him at the Comet, he was secretly glad to be foot-free again. And when, after only a few days' idleness, he secured a job with the superintendent of the salmon hatchery located on Twenty Mile Lake, he rolled his blankets, hit the trail

and joyously told his terrier that "his luck was in."

They struck the old skid road past the end of Swan Lake, made the foothills by noon and until evening followed the pack trail northward, camping that night on the edge of a caribou meadow of the low divide separating the Twin Forks country from the valley of the Twenty Mile. Next morning at dawn they started down the northward slope and that evening reached the fishery patrol cabin on Twenty Mile Lake. Hughes, the superintendent, was waiting for them there, and next morning they climbed aboard his gas-boat for the trip up lake to where Ed was to be employed for several weeks.

Before sun-up they were chugging eastward, the battered stem post of the little craft puckering the smooth fabric of the lake's surface. Far ahead of them, eighty to a hundred miles away, the snow peaks glowed cold and chaste in the strengthening light, and from the lake shore on either side the forest spread like a dark green rug thrown over the folds between the hills where the purple shadows lurked. It was a splendid, silent land, a country which was new to Ed Sibley. And as Derry perched on the scanty decking in the bow like a black and tan figurehead, Hughes, who loved this kingdom which was his by right of exploration, talked to Ed about it.

"Some day they'll log it off," he said regretfully. "Then it'll look like any other valley farther south. But logging—that's not so bad. Somebody gains

when they log. Fire—that's what spoils a country."

"Certainly puts an end to the wild life. Birds and animals and so on," Ed commented.

"Hits the fish just as bad—or worse. Lots of folks can't see that. They think because the water's still there, the fish must be. Shows how much they know. In mountain country like this, the trout and so on can't live without the forest. Look. See that side valley over there?"

Ed followed the direction of Hughes' uplifted arm and saw a narrow valley which seemed to run for miles back from Twenty Mile Lake. He could not see the lake Hughes had spoken of, but from the nature of the ground it was easy to imagine one there. What he particularly noticed was that all the high ground around the valley of Half-moon Lake had been swept by forest fire.

"How long since that was burned off?" he asked.

"Ten years ago this summer. Before the fire there wasn't a place on this continent that gave better fishing than that little lake. Now it's barren. Not a trout in it. Not one trout—the fire killed 'em all."

Then as the sun came up and they voyaged steadily eastward Ed Sibley heard from the veteran fish culturalist the tragic story of that silent lake between the flanking, fire-swept hills.

Half-moon Lake lay in its basin of granite, tucked away in a fold of the timbered hills. Hemlocks, cedars

and vine maples came close to the water and peered dreamily at their reflections there. At the upper end Half-moon Creek made stately curves through the heavy timber and across a beaver meadow to join the lake. A mile away, at the lower end of the lake, the creek plunged over a ledge so steep that mist always hung in the dark green branches beside the falls. There were no other streams either into or out of Half-moon Lake.

In Half-moon Lake there reigned a race of cut-throat trout; superb creatures, lusty of fin and hard of flesh. During the long summer evenings they used to dimple the water at the upper end where the inflowing creek carried their food to them from the warmer water of the beaver meadow where it was bred so lavishly. Blind channels of slow waters almost choked with rich vegetation sprawled like idle fingers across the meadow. Here the fly larvæ, the bronze-backed water beetles and the minute crustaceans multiplied and downstream, where the coiling water joined the tranquil blue of the lake, the trout were bountifully fed.

Half-moon Creek did more than feed the trout. In the spring the breeding fish ascended it to spawn. No rushing mountain stream this, to carry away the precious eggs or, springing madly into freshet, scour out the nests among the gravel, but a stream whose well aerated water flowed evenly and unfailingly over beds of fine clean-washed gravel. Here healthy trout

were hatched and here, in the dancing pools below the riffles, the fry and fingerlings played and fed and learned to swim and dart at the food particles the stream brought down to them. During the summer they graduated to the lake and fed lustily until, before winter crept down from the snow peaks far above and sealed the lake in ice, they had grown to be three or four inches long, well formed and broad of back.

In April the ice always went first from the upper end of the lake. Schooling closer in toward the creek mouth the trout would come in answer to the age-old spawning urge. Rounded females, heavy with eggs, lay poised in the current just where the bank at the creek mouth dropped steeply off into the deep lake waters. Thin-sided males, their under parts already taking on the darker spawning colors, cruised restlessly. These all were the larger trout. The younger ones followed after a week or more.

Then one evening, when the purple dusk crept up the sidehills and the stars, with their reflections for partners, danced coldly on the polished lake surface, the first schools would enter the creek, move purposefully through the lower reaches of the beaver meadow and gain the narrower stretches beyond where the water flowed evenly, smoothly over the clean, well-rounded gravel. Then in little pools or close against an overhanging bank they would wait before moving onto the shallow spawning beds.

Exciting times those, when the males darted trucu-

lently at one another until the stronger had won the approval of a mate and had discouraged their less persistent rivals. A shallow hole would be scooped out in the loose gravel, the eggs deposited until, after a week each pair would have entrusted almost a thousand to the stream. Secured in the gravel that covered them and supplied with oxygen from the water that circulated through it, they would remain until the embryo developed and broke through the soft shell.

Their annual pilgrimage up the stream completed, the trout dropped downstream and fed prodigiously at the creek mouth, growing prime and lusty again. Sudden freshets would have scoured out the nests and carried the eggs into lifeless backwaters where silt could filter down and smother them, or a drought leave them stranded above the water level. But in Half-moon Creek the flow of water was uninterrupted, even. The drenching rains were held back by the many square miles of root-woven forest floor and distributed evenly in times of drought.

A month or more later the eggs would hatch. Then for a few weeks the little fish, with their cumbersome yolk sacs attached to their under-sides, would lie in the gloom of the gravel that covered them, until this nourishment was consumed. Then wriggling upward toward the light they became free swimming and sidled across the gentler wisps of current, feeding. When, during the summer, they outgrew their nursery in the narrow pools, they dropped down to the deeper

the lake was tainted, unpurged by any ruffling breeze. The trout went deeper. Through the lanes of what had been a city of towering trees sluggish flames prowled, feasting on the fallen giants, eating their way deep into the sponge-like carpet of roots and mold.

And then the rain, like reënforcements that came too late, fell on the rear guard of the fire and annihilated it. But the fight was already lost. Relentlessly the rain teemed down. The foliage that had formerly broken its fall was gone and it smote the baked side-hills smartly, wearing deepening water-courses down the scarred faces. The elastic fibrous roots that had kept the mold in place were killed and brittle. They gave way before the sagging weight of drenched soil. Like the hide showing through the fur of a moth-eaten rug, the bare granite slopes appeared where their covering was being washed away. Overturned trees, their roots in air, were left stranded on the rocks, skeletons of wrecked ships where the tide receded.

With only brief pauses the heavy rains continued until the freeze-up in November.

Next spring the trout once more ascended Half-moon Creek. The shelving bar at its mouth now was cut through by a deep channel. The reach through the beaver meadow, too, was deeper. The slack water, the blind channels and pockets where food had bred in other years, were above the level of the hurrying water, dry and already crisping before the warming May sun. Farther upstream, where had been wide, smooth-flowing

riffles, dappled with shade, were harsh channels torn through a wilderness of blackened snags. The water was fast now, the spawning beds scoured out and the precious gravel mixed with the tangles of uprooted stumps and matted branches.

The fish spawned where they could. Some overcrowded the few remaining patches of smooth gravel and in their frenzy scooped out each other's nests and gave the eggs to the angry water to whirl downstream and kill. Others spawned in the main channel among bowlders where the eggs could not be secured and hatched. It was the same spawning period with its old frenzy and restlessness, but all the natural conditions were against, instead of aiding, propagation. When it was over, the trout hurried to the creek mouth to feed and regain vigor and weight.

But now there was scarcely any food. The luscious reaches in the beaver meadow were baked and lifeless, their water vegetation a dry and tangled mat of mud-caked stalks. The supply of food that had come from it for so long had been stranded and killed. Since the fire the sponge-like carpet of the wide valley above did not hold the rains and melting snow and release them evenly through a thousand tiny feeders. The roots and the filtering soil they kept in place had been washed down with each freshet. The creek, instead of being sparklingly clear, was sullied and slit laden. With every rain it boomed and in dry weather shriveled to a twisted ribbon of water among the outscoured

CHAPTER XI

ED'S DOG FRIDAY

After they had made a fire and lunched, Hughes showed Ed what his work was to be and then because he had to get down the lake before dark, he pushed off his dinghy to row out to the gasboat which they had anchored in deep water.

"See you toward the end of the week," he said as he left them. "There's nobody within forty miles of here but you got the dog to keep you company."

"Oh, sure," Ed replied. There was no great enthusiasm apparent in his remark, for since they had landed, Derry had shown little interest in the place. Perhaps the long confinement of the boat trip had wearied him, perhaps he missed the excitement of his free life with the pack of undisciplined dogs on Main Street at Twin Forks. But whatever the reason he seemed not at all elated with the prospect of life on this small island at the creek mouth.

Ed watched Hughes make fast the dinghy's painter to the towing cleat, heard him start the heavy duty engine of the gray boat and threw up his arm in reply to the gesture of farewell that came to him from the wheelhouse door. Then he turned to the Airedale and

grinned ruefully. "Good company? What a hope!" he said.

Derry's only retort was an audible sniff. He may have been merely catching the acrid scent of the gas-boat's fumes but to his master it seemed suspiciously like an expression of haughty contempt of all feeble sarcasm, of hatchery superintendents and government employment in general.

"Say, pillar-of-gloom," Ed went on, pretending anger, "mebbe you don't fancy being marooned on this bit of island, but that doesn't say you can sniff at me. There's five dollars a day and all found on this job, so we're sticking. See?"

Derry's only answer was a look of cool indifference. Then he swung over onto one haunch and devoted all his energy to scratching the region immediately behind his right ear. When that diversion was completed he stood up and yawned heavily. He made it very plain how little this Robinson Crusoe business appealed to him.

The truth of the matter was that Derry was bored —bored stiff. When he and Ed left Twin Forks Derry's hopes of good hunting and amusement in new country had run high. But within half an hour after the superintendent had brought them here those hopes had dwindled and died. He had rushed to all parts of the island looking for game and had found none. The sandy lakeward end was barren, arid, scentless. The scrubby trees beyond held no squirrels. Not even a

stupid things moving senselessly in the shadowed water, vague shapes that could not rouse even passing interest.

Ed tested this fence as thoroughly as the other, found it intact and strong and returned to the bank of the island. Derry was staring glumly at the sand between his paws and seemed to have almost made up his mind to stretch out for another forty winks.

"Well, Man Friday," Ed chuckled, trying to spatter Derry with drops from his dripping boot, "still staring to find the footprint in the sand, eh? You think this is a dead place. Wouldn't believe when I said we might get a bit of hunting. I got a strong hunch there'll be the odd bear a mile or so up the creek. No use you coming along, you being so positive the country's a dead hole. So you stay here and keep right on hating yourself, see?"

Derry may not have grasped the significance of this oration at the moment, but when Ed went up to the tent and returned with his rifle, he seemed to understand.

"Nothing doing, laddie," Ed cautioned, as Derry started to wade the creek behind him. "You're so set against the place you wouldn't believe your eyes if a bear walked right up and played pat-a-cake with you. Home's the place for you. See you later. Mebbe I'll let you sniff a bear hide by dark. S'long."

Derry realized that persuasion would avail him nothing so he stalked back to the bank and yawned to show

how little he cared for such a futile chase. Bears? Huh! He drank a little water, chewed awkwardly at a grass tuft among the pebbles and looked along the fence with a disinterested eye. And as he looked a surprising thing happened.

Except for a few last bars of light which the setting sun sent through the spaces between the low trees, the entire creek was now in shadow. During the bright day the salmon had lurked in deep water but with the evening the first of the impatient schools had entered the creek mouth to renew their assault on the barrier which kept them from the spawning grounds they had come so far to find. While Derry looked along the fence the first of the attackers leaped. It flashed through the air for six feet and struck the pickets smartly, only to fall broadside into the rippling water.

Derry with a wisp of grass still at an absurd angle between his black lips, cocked his ears in amazement. It was evident he doubted his eyes. The tilt of his head, his half-lifted paw showed that the spectacle had struck him as incredulous. But as if to prove to him he was not dreaming, a second fish leaped swiftly at the barrier. Derry's astonishment found expression in a snort so violent that the grass was blown from his gaping mouth.

He bounded forward, came down stiff-legged and alert. It was absurd, utterly absurd, and if it happened again he'd do something about it. He thought he knew all about fish, after that day at Swan River,

to his left and soused him with water as it fell, he tried to wheel sharply in time to snap at it.

Alas for pride! In that instant of glorious supremacy he felt himself losing his balance. He clawed the stringer, struggled vainly to regain his precarious hold—and then he started to topple headlong into that struggling school of fish. A ludicrous, despairing wail rose from his lips only to be smothered as he went out of sight.

During his months in the Northland Derry had encountered a few of the wild things that dwelt there. Some of his skirmishes he had won, in all he had given a good account of himself, but now for the first time he realized that he was hopelessly outclassed. From the security of the stringer these salmon had seemed ineffectual and blundering; now among them in their own element his lofty sense of superiority vanished. His fall had thrown them into panic, had set the whole school in violent motion. In these unnatural, restricted waters, concerted action was for them impossible. Some darted a short distance downstream, wheeled with the perfect speed of a troop of rough riders and then, crowding behind the hundreds of others ranked below the fence, sent them ahead in an almost solid mass. Derry, who had been so contemptuous of salmon a moment before, found himself the center of this mad stampede. Hard bony noses thudded against his ribs, interfered with his striving feet; the ripping swirls from a thousand thrashing tails made swimming almost

impossible, half-blinded him by the smother of foam and water. He came up gasping—and mad clean through.

A dorsal fin sheared the water a few inches from his nose and, determined to assert his authority even in this predicament, he lurched, snapped and held on. That was an unwise thing to do for with one mighty kick of its spread tail the salmon yanked him half under. Before he could let go he was turned on his side. He came up sputtering and wallowing while he shook the water from his dripping face. Then he struck out for the shore of the island. His feet found bottom, he surged up the sloping beach and even as he shook himself there came to his nostrils a strong scent, one that he did not know—the scent of bear.

The slow air currents came toward him from the lake. He stood perfectly still, the water dripping to the dry sand from his haunches, while he raised his muzzle, moved it from side to side and inhaled to catch the strange scent again. He found a wisp of it, looked up wind and saw a black shape silhouetted against the tawny sand of the spit.

The bear—a small two-year-old black—had come to Sockeye Creek to fish. He had waded the shallows at the mouth, plowing recklessly across the smooth-running flow and had taken up a position close to the shore of the island. His approach had made the salmon turn back but he knew they would not be content to remain out in the lake for long. Now as he stood

of power, swaggered back into the water again. He did not see the grinning Airedale watching him from behind a thicket.

Once more he stood stolidly waiting for a salmon to swim close to him. It would soon be dark and he must waste no time if he intended to appease his hunger. He saw a red shape, and then another, come up the current. They paused, came closer. Now—now was the time to strike. And then from close behind him came an explosive "Yowp!" that made him jump as if he had been struck.

This time he did not walk ashore. He charged, sending up sheets of water with every jump. But when he reached the sand the dog was twenty feet away, forelegs spread, eyes snapping with anticipation, waiting for him to come closer. He came, Derry dodged, circled and rushed like a demon whose perverted sense of humor made him fearless. The bear spun around and struck viciously. His paw met empty air. The dog was somewhere else.

Then began a battle more ludicrous than any ever shown on stage or silver sheet. Derry—whose inborn sense of tactics served him well—knew the danger of coming to close quarters with his opponent. But also he knew how completely he could confuse and worry the heavy-muscled salmon hunter. Yard by yard he drew the bear farther from the water. He dashed away in mock terror, circled and rushed at him as true as an arrow only to swerve when annihilation seemed in-

evitable and scamper out of reach of those slashing forepaws.

With each failure to close with this small, exasperating enemy the bear became more angry. He growled and with every futile blow there came from his gaping mouth a hoarse exhalation, an outraged grunt that showed what colossal force he put into each vain stroke. Sometimes Derry would retire, lie down on the sand and pretend to be ignorant of the bear's existence. And then he would spring up and renew his confusing tactics.

The twilight deepened into night. The salmon schools crowded recklessly over the bar at the creek mouth, and still the hungry bear went supperless. At last he retreated, balked and filled with smoldering anger. He splashed noisily across the channel and was lost in the brush. Somewhere there he would lie and nurse his resentment against this interfering dog.

But there was no anger in Derry's heart. He brimmed with good spirits now. For a place that had promised so little, the island was proving to be a happy hunting ground. Dark had called off the game, but to-morrow there might be other games.

The moon was rising when Ed Sibley returned to camp. Derry saw he was empty handed—and disgusted. "What a country. Plowed through miles of crabapple swamp, messed round sand bars and log jams. Saw no game bigger'n a squirrel. You're right, pup. It's a dead hole sure enough."

choosing what, through the glasses, seemed the best ways of ascent. By circling far to the right there was a long, but sure, way up. By climbing directly from the creek—"Hittin' the old hill in the face," Ed called it—it seemed possible for a good climber to get to the snowfield and the slides, put in a few hours hunting and still be off the mountain before darkness fell.

Late one afternoon when Hughes arrived at the Sockeye Creek camp Ed asked him if the mountain had a name.

"We call it Thunder Mountain," the superintendent told him. "Good summer goat country, too."

"Just what I been thinking," Ed said with quickened interest.

"If it was only a bit more accessible," Hughes went on, "I'd like to have a *nannich* round up there and see what game I could find. The crew down at the main camp are hollerin' for fresh meat."

" 'Tain't a hard climb," Ed assured him. "I spent hours getting the layout of it. I've looked at it when the light was hitting it from most every angle and I'm ready to bank on getting up it from the creek side."

"You sure?" the superintendent questioned.

"Betcha. Want me to try it to-morrow?"

"Suit yourself, Sibley. I'll be stopping here until day after to-morrow anyway, so you're free to go. The meat would come in mighty useful."

Ed's slow grin widened. "To-morrow at supper

time you and me'll be scoffin' goat liver and bacon—with onions. If only we had the onions!"

"My favorite confection," Hughes laughed. "But you'll need a powerful early start to get up there in time to make a kill and be back here before dark."

Next day Ed and Derry were hours on their way before sun-up. Before ten o'clock they were well back from the creek and starting to climb. The sidehill was steep but, fortunately for them, unbroken by bluffs or outcrops of bare rock. Before long the growth of timber became sparse and they found themselves approaching the broken mountain side above which the snowfield sloped from the scarred avalanche courses stretching like long fingers of green down from the wild basins between the stark, upstanding peaks. Soon they passed timberline and with no hemlock scrub to hide his movements, Ed began a careful crawl toward the foot of the cliff ahead. After twenty minutes' slow advance with Derry crouching behind him, Ed looked up and saw he had only ten more feet of open ground to cross before he reached the big rock he was making for. Once he gained it he could sit up and examine every foot of the cliff face six hundred yards ahead. Bearing his weight on the forearm folded under his chest, pushing himself with his toes, he shoved the dull black barrel of his rifle through the heather before him and moved with the utmost care to avoid discovery by some black-spiked watcher on the distant ledges.

Derry moved as warily as his master. When Ed

some safe meadow instead of on that narrow shelf of rock four thousand feet above the valley. One by one they reached the top and disappeared among the snow and rock ridges that sloped steeply upward from the brink.

Had Ed been a greenhorn he might have tried an impossible shot at them. They were about eight hundred yards from him, but like all experienced hunters he preferred holding his fire to taking the chance of wounding an animal only to have it escape and die a lingering death. Besides, wounded goats had a knack of taking refuge in places where no human could reach them, and Ed, like most men on the frontier, hunted from necessity and not from a sheer love of killing. When the band had disappeared he stood erect, grinned ruefully and stretched his limbs.

But Derry lacked his master's philosophy. He whined and looked appealingly toward the snow field high above. He wanted to give chase to such elusive quarry.

"Cheer up," Ed soothed. "We'll give 'em a run for it yet. What say we eat and give 'em time to forget us. They'll be feeding on the slides this afternoon. We'll get above them and pick the animal we want."

The opening of the grub bag gave Derry more immediate anxiety and he almost forgot the goats. Would he, or would he not, be given a share of the lunch? He sat at a respectful distance and was moved alternately by hope and blank despair.

When hope was uppermost his tail thumped the heather stalks; when he thought luck was against him his head drooped and vain longing showed in his eloquent eyes. But, since Ed was himself a person of generous appetite, the lunch he had made was ample for two men, so with satisfying frequency Derry's jaws came together with a muffled "clop" on the pieces that were thrown to him. From Derry's standpoint the lunch was an unqualified success.

But Ed had other things to think about while he ate. With his back against the west side of the rock he sat and studied the cliff for a possible route of ascent. Time after time he put the glasses to his eyes to scrutinize some difficult place.

Though he was no veteran mountaineer, he had done enough scrambling among the mountain ranges of the North Pacific coast to know the wisdom of carefully choosing a route before beginning a climb. He wanted to make very sure he did not find himself part way up to the top in a place where he could neither get up nor down. But finally he thought he saw a feasible way by which, except where the ledge was broken by one "chimney," it would not be necessary to risk his neck. He finished his lunch, packed the grub sack, slung his rifle and started across the heather to the base of the long cliff. Derry, finding discipline relaxed, wanted to make use of the interlude for play.

But Ed was not in a playful mood. Although he would not admit it, that chimney through the ledge was

Suppose the chimney was too wide to cross! But not until he was on its brink could he know for certain.

"Getting the wind up, eh?" he jeered, trying to repulse the timidity which was urging him to turn back. He rounded the corner and came abruptly to the dreaded fissure on whose edge Derry stood and whined in apprehension. Ed saw he must jump to reach the ledge beyond!

In other circumstances it would have been a ridiculously easy jump of not more than four feet. But when Ed saw what lay on the far side of it, beads of sweat moistened his chin and temples. The ledge there was wider but along the edge of the chimney the rock was weathered. It seemed loose and crumbling. Supposing that when he jumped the edge gave way! Thrown off his guard by the thought he looked down to the plateau and when he tried to turn his eyes away he found them fascinated by the dizzy drop.

Angry at himself he turned abruptly and the butt of his slung rifle tapped the rock wall against which his erect body was pressed. The slight jar of the blow, the realization that he had nearly lost his balance, sent panic surging through him. His head was reeling, nausea seized him, his fingers became talons clawing futilely for a secure hold. And then he heard himself shouting hoarsely, commanding Derry to make the leap he himself dreaded.

His effort at self-preservation was brutal in its sudden strength. If the top layer of rock *was* loose, it and

Derry would hurtle down to the base of the cliff and then, with firm foothold exposed, he could leap to safety. His love for the Airedale, all cherished hopes for their close comradeship, were sacrificed to his animal desire to escape this hideous death.

Derry was stung as if by a lash at the cold authority of the voice. Its frantic urgency overcame his own fears and with one piteous whine he shuffled for a firm foothold, crouched—and jumped. When Ed saw the rock held, he took his hands from the cliff, wheeled, leaped and scrambled back from the brink to lie sprawling, face down, on the ledge.

A moment later, when his head cleared, Ed sat up and looked toward Derry. Then in shame he turned away. He could not meet the unconscious accusation of those honest eyes! He had betrayed a loyal friend —and he knew it.

Had Derry been a human comrade of the trail whom he had deserted in time of need, Ed's abhorrence of his deed could have been no greater. But in the direct mind of the dog a crisis passed was a crisis forgotten and, while they mounted the wide ledge to the top of the cliff, the goat signs his eyes and nose found blurred all thoughts of happenings in the last few moments. Up the slope from the brink ran a game trail which was made clearer by the dust tracked there by the hoofs of their quarry. Derry knew the chase was getting hot again.

Ed was the first to see a goat and when he dropped

Derry crouched beside him and looked intently in the direction of his master's gaze. Then, sixty yards up the slope, he saw two black spikes silhouetted against the dazzling white of the snowfield. Nothing else showed above the level upward sweep of the surface, but by his master's sudden vigilance the dog knew a goat lay hidden there. Body slightly crouched and head out-thrust on a level with his shoulders, he watched his master drop on one knee, bring the rifle to his shoulder, then give one sharp whistle. The dark eyes and mildly curious face of a goat appeared. The rifle cracked. The goat crumpled. Unexpectedly the hunt was over.

They ran up the slope to where the animal had dropped in the cool bed it had scooped for itself, and Derry now freed of restraint, barked his triumph. Soon he became silent, puzzled by his master's brooding quiet. Why didn't he smile at him, give him a rough pat on the head, tell him he had been a good dog? Why did Ed's eyes avoid meeting his own? Had he unwittingly broken some rule of the hunt that he should be so ignored? He was conscious of having done no wrong and yet he knew some cloud had come between them. Downcast and vaguely unhappy he edged away and left Ed stolidly at work with skinning knife in hand.

Derry trotted off to the right where a rock bluff threw its blue-black shadow on the strip of snow between it and the cliff edge. His paws crunched the

sun-softened snow of the slope and then when he heard a marmot's arresting whistle he broke into a run, flashed into the heavy shadow of the bluff, felt his footing become precarious and tried, too late, to stop. The snow below the bluff was glazed and hard as ice. His blunt claws raked it vainly as his feet went from under him. He scrambled to recover his balance, flopped to his side and started to slide down to the brink even as Ed's shout of horror came to him. His speed quickened, he rolled, turned end about, half rose and fell again on the very brink where the wind had exposed a slab of granite. It stunned him—but it stopped him from plunging to the rocks five hundred feet below. For a minute he lay inert and helpless where one convulsive movement might have thrown him into space.

Before Ed was halfway to the bluff he knew that without his aid Derry could never leave that spot alive. He saw the dog come unsteadily to his feet and at the sight the same frantic fear which had clutched him at the chimney came back to him. Once more he felt that sickening, unnerving fear of height.

"Lie down," he shouted. "Wait for me—I'm coming." His words were mockery. How could he face a place compared to which the chimney had been safety? But though he knew the assurance he tried to give was false Derry never doubted. His master had never before gone away and left him in trouble—nor would he do so now. He barked hopefully and watched the youth above him on the snow.

The confidence of that bark was torture to Ed. His dog trusted him supremely and yet it was less than half an hour since he had ruthlessly risked the Airedale's life to save himself.

"I can't—I can't," he kept muttering, gazing fearfully toward the waiting dog. And then suddenly, by some unguessed process of thought, he found he was furiously angry—angry with himself, at the cliff, at that unreasoning dread of high places, at all that tried to hold him from what was the only thing he could do for this dog he loved. With the blood-stained skinning knife still in his hand he crossed the borderline into the shadow of the frowning bluff.

Foot by foot he crept along its uneven base. Below him beyond that strip of ice and crusted snow were the jagged bowlders of the heather meadow, dwarfed by height—waiting for him. One misstep now and he would start down that treacherous chute; and yet, because of this odd, towering anger within him, the dog alone seemed to matter.

"I'm going, I tell you—I'm going," he panted as if to some unseen being that tried to hold him back. Once his foot slipped, dislodged a stone and sent it spinning over the edge. He listened but no sound came up from the bottom of the cliff. Derry whined a little, then stopped when he saw Ed had regained his footing.

When Ed was directly above the dog, he leaned outward, hacked a toehold in the hard crust, stepped into it and cut another lower down. Step by step, not

daring to look out, he approached the edge. Each time his knife descended, ice splinters went tinkling off the brink into space.

As he came nearer, Derry grew impatient. Ed warned him to stand still, and as he looked down to give force to the command he could not help but see how precariously he hung above that awful drop. Somehow, to look fairly over the cliff, to glance deliberately down, sent a surge of confidence through him, made him master of himself. He worked his way nearer, cut the last step, encircled Derry's body in one arm and mounted that crude staircase to the bluff.

When they were safe on the soft snow he started to put Derry down, then, changing his mind, lifted him to the level of his shoulder.

"Looked like I was a yellow cur," he confided in a voice that was not quite steady, "but mebbe things are square now." Then he turned deliberately and, ashamed no longer, met the clear honesty of those brown eyes.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN THE PAST CALLS

When the hatchery gang arrived at Sockeye Creek Ed was able to turn over to them all the salmon which he had kept safely below the fences on either side of the little island. Hughes took him and Derry down the lake and during the last days of August he and the terrier reached Twin Forks once more.

Hoskins had several weeks' work for him at the Comet and though almost every day he talked with some of the veteran sportsmen who came there, to no one did he tell of what had happened on Thunder Mountain. Yet those tense moments remained vivid in his mind; for him they somehow seemed to mark the termination of Derry's puppyhood, and as he watched him with other dogs on the street in front of the garage he told himself that Hoskins and the others who had said he would spoil Derry, were wrong. Derry was his, their comradeship had, he felt, been sealed by that experience during the goat hunt, and whatever happened he held the friendship of this youngster who was coming to mean so much to him.

True, Derry had his moments of unruliness. As he matured and became less dependent on his master for his physical well-being, his inborn independence was more noticeable. But in Ed's eyes his occasional trans-

gressions seemed trifling. The morning Hoskins and all the Comet crowd went down to the train with hunting dogs and rifles for their annual coyote round-up in the sheep ranching country north of Division, Derry had got somewhat out of hand. Ed had been forced to chase him all the way to the station and bring him home on the leash. But this was natural enough, he told himself. Any dog might act like this. So it was not until the day when Derry rebelled openly and strayed miles from home in direct breach of orders that Ed began to entertain grave doubts about him.

One morning Derry lay at the open doors of the garage, basking in the sunlight. For morning after morning he had followed Ed hopefully from the house on Balsam Street. Each time they left he had brimmed with an eager hope that at last the monotony of this town routine would end, that they were once again to hit the trail into the forested hills as they had done during those entrancing weeks over in the Twenty Mile country. But always he was doomed to disappointment. To hunt, to roam the untrodden places, it was for this he longed; deep within him a new restlessness was stirring and would not be denied.

Though new snow lay on the sparsely timbered shoulders of the mountains flanking the valley, the sun was warm enough to make him drowsy. His half-closed eyes lazily regarded a springer spaniel trotting with dignity up the deserted street. He drew in his forelegs as if to rise and try to cajole it into a friendly

tussle, but the sunshine discouraged even this mild exertion. He rolled to his side, displayed a pink furl of tongue in a ponderous yawn, and with legs outstretched sighed half from boredom and half from sleepy content. He roused to snap at an insistent bull-fly, then lowered his head to the planks and closed his eyes.

He had slept but little the night before. As he lay in his kennel the dark had borne vague memories of scents he had not known before, the keen air had made him restless and brought to him the ghosts of strange desires. Some unsettling urge born of the changing season, of the rustle of autumn leaves and the whistling, unseen flight of migrating water-fowl had come out of the dim past to trouble him. He had left his kennel to prowl the grass plot inside the fence until dawn brought reality again. Now in the full light of day things were normal and he had a healthy desire for sleep.

But the bull-fly buzzed close to his ear and he jerked up his head to eye it with hard disapproval. Then he rose and stalked into the garage. Somewhere inside he would finish his snooze where pestering flies could not find him. He made for the pile of old sacks beneath the work bench.

Ed Sibley stood at the far end of the bench talking soberly with a settler. Something in the quality of their voices attracted him and he stood watching them, his ears moving to catch their changing tones and occasional sharp exclamations. His indolence vanished

for his master's face told him something was amiss. He could not know they spoke of the thing that had been the main topic of conversation in Twin Forks for the past two days—the coming of the big cougar, the tawny killer in the shadows.

Two nights ago a ewe had been slain a mile north of town; last night Neal, the rancher from up river, had lost a prize Ayrshire yearling and had hurried in to get hunters to avenge that kill only to learn that Hoskins, Olson, Drummond and all the most experienced sportsmen had already left for the coyote hunt. He was excited as he repeated his story to Ed Sibley.

"Before I got to the clearing I knew something was wrong. The cattle were milling round and straight off I saw the yearling wasn't with 'em. You know that strip of slash on the north side? That's where I found it—sucked dry as a sponge."

"Wasn't torn any?"

"Hardly a scratch. They tell me that ewe wasn't mauled either. That cougar hunts for blood, not meat."

"He'll try to kill most every night then."

"I figger he will, Ed. Anyhow I got the dog and put her on the track but in twenty minutes she came ki-yi-in' back with her tail between her legs."

"You think the cougar turned on her?"

"Must have. They're mighty big tracks and what chance has any dog that's never hunted cougar got ag'in a hundred an' fifty pounds of lightnin'?"

While the rancher was talking, Ed's eye fell on Derry, squatted alertly beside him, and vainly he tried to imagine the terrier slinking back to him as Neal's had done. Ed felt sure his dog—untried on big game though he was—would never quit. For that very reason Derry must not be allowed to close with the big marauder. His very courage would betray him, for Derry, not knowing the meaning of surrender, would never cease battling until he had been killed—and a cougar that would not tree was a dangerous foe even for an experienced dog.

"Wish Hoskins or Olson was home," Neal was saying. "Guess all we can do is organize a big hunt. We might make it so hot that the critter'd clear out."

Ed reminded Neal how less than a year ago, when a big cougar had invaded a well-populated farming community down at the Coast, such wholesale hunting had been tried but the cougar had simply gone into hiding. When the excitement waned it had renewed its deadly raids. At last an experienced hunter and his dog had been secured and within a week the outlaw had been killed.

"There's a man down at Division that's hunted cougars," he suggested. "I've heard Olson say he's got a mighty good dog."

"Wish we could bring him up," Neal said. "We got to do something and do it quick."

"If you like I'll go down to the station this afternoon and see if the agent can raise him on the wire."

"All right, Ed. You tell him we need him bad. Stock's not safe here any more." Neal went out to relate his account of the slaughter to a group loitering on the porch of the store opposite.

That morning Ed's thoughts dwelt on the two kills which had alarmed the settlement. A cleverly planned ambush, a leap silent and sure and then the stricken animal had staggered beneath its murderous load and fallen never to rise again. For a moment lashing hoofs would beat the turf and then there would be only the stealthy sounds of feasting until the sated killer vanished in the shadow of the heavy timber. "Gee, if only Derry was wise to cougars—but, no, I daren't take the chance."

Derry was somewhere out of sight when Ed went down to the railway station that afternoon. Ed whistled for him and when he did not appear he lost no more time in sending the message. Twenty minutes later he came up the hill with the news that the hunter at Division had gone over the range to build a trapping cabin and would not be out for a month.

As he neared the garage, the storekeeper hailed him from across the street. "Heard the latest, Ed? Stillson from up near the Green Slide lost his dog this morning."

"How?" Ed asked evenly.

"Seems he found fresh cougar tracks and put Buster onto them. The dog ran up the sidehill and then Stillson heard it barkin' 's if he had found something.

He got there quick's he could but the dog was slashed to ribbons."

Ed received this news in silence. He knew and liked that old hound; a strong, courageous dog, one of the veteran bear dogs of the valley. It angered him that old Buster should have been killed by such a creature. He wondered if there was any likelihood of closing with the beast without the aid of a dog, but though cougars were rare in this part of the country he knew his chances were so slight that a hunt would be useless.

An hour later he remembered that Derry had not yet turned up. He whistled and called, visited all his favorite spots in the vicinity of the garage and was on the point of going home to see if the terrier had preceded him, when a man in front of the hotel called to him.

"Looking for that pup? I seen him trailin' Neal half an hour ago. Making for the river road."

"That so?" Ed replied carelessly. The speaker came sometimes to the Comet and Ed knew he had joined with some of the others in their criticisms of his methods of training.

"You best dangle after him. If that old cougar—"

"Fat chance it would have with an Airedale," Ed countered. "Anyhow the dog's probably home by now. Like as not he swung up the hill the back way."

He returned to close the garage for the day, but because of a late customer, it was almost dusk when

he reached home, only to find that Derry had not been seen there since dinner time.

When Neal saw that Derry persisted in following him he was tempted to return to town and hand the dog over to its master. But as he thought of his stock grazing unprotected in the home pasture, he decided his time was too valuable to be wasted in returning wayward dogs. Besides, it was quite likely he would pass some one on the road and could send Derry back to Twin Forks with him. But while the dog was with him he felt responsible for its safety; the woods were no place for a young dog while the killer was at large, and so he made Derry stay within sight.

The air was sharp with a suggestion of the frost the night would bring. Cool, earthy odors were wafted out into the road. Derry fretted at the restraint but Neal kept him close and called him sharply each time he tried to enter the woods. Cottonwoods, alders and vine maples stood out crimson and yellow against the dark wall of conifers along the river. From high in air the clanging, questing call of wild geese drifted down and Derry, descendant of countless generations reared in domesticity, felt again the primal unrest which had kept him prowling most of the night before. At his heart unguessed desires were tugging, calling him to course the forest and share with some phantom pack the fierce lust of the kill.

Time after time Neal checked him but always his pace would quicken as the restlessness within him drew him on.

"You stick with me," Neal ordered. "I'll be blamed if anything happens." Derry glanced up, wagged his tail and tried to keep close. But a moment later he forgot the man, forgot the demands of discipline as his nostrils caught a scent that took him bounding through the salmon berry bushes lining the road.

Neal shouted at him, but Derry, now only dimly conscious of the shout, had crashed through the last of the brittle stalks and had reached the origin of that scent which had fanned his slumbering unrest to sudden flame. He had followed Neal because Neal had a rifle and a rifle meant hunting, and now the hunt would start. All his contacts with man became for Derry things which had never been real as the call of his wild past took possession of him. The unknown telepathy of the wilderness, the spirit of the changing seasons which had entered his blood the previous night, drew him madly on. He forgot Neal, forgot his master, forgot everything except that he was free and on the trail of an unknown foe.

On a decayed log, fifty yards from the roadside, his nostrils found where the big cougar had crouched not ten minutes before. Neal, plunging through the fringe of brush, saw the dog take up the hot trail. Unslinging his rifle he started on the hopeless chase.

There under the big evergreens, the earth was carpeted with moss, lit dimly by the light of fading day which filtered through the thatch of boughs high overhead. It was a sinister place and far ahead now Neal heard an occasional bark from the reckless Airedale as it put more fateful distance between it and safety. Neal ran on despairingly, vaulting logs, crashing through waist-high barriers of brush, heading straight for those diminishing sounds.

"Derry! Derry!" he shouted, hoping vainly that the dog would hear and come back in time. The only answer was a faint bark, coming through the dusk from half a mile away.

Derry never heard those shouts. For him, men and their ways were things that had never been and he was an untamed dog leading the ghostly pack as his kind had done when the world was young. Time and place had been turned back ten thousand years by the stirring magic which last night had cast its spell on him.

Then as the hot trail led him up the sidehill he glimpsed his enemy. Ears flat, tail stub erect and white teeth gleaming between his black lips, he left the trail and headed like an avenging arrow for the place he had sighted it.

When the cougar heard Neal's first shout of alarm it had been stalking leisurely along the flat not far from the road. It had bounded to a log and listened. When it heard the dog upon its trail it had started up the side-

hill—not because it feared its pursuer, but because it wanted to be safely out of reach of the man before it turned.

Now the sounds of the man came faintly and the cougar went less hastily, its supple body moving noiselessly through the deepening shadows. It circled, crouched on a log and looked down the slope. In a few moments it had its first glimpse of the dog—a smaller thing even than the one it had killed that morning. Its tail lashed angrily, its claws kneaded the soft wood and a snarl wrinkled its broad face. When chance favored it was a killer swift and ruthless. And dogs, more than any other living thing, it hated.

Still the Airedale came on. The cougar's paws shifted as it gathered for the spring, but at that moment the faint voice of the man drifted up to it. It knew the dog would not turn back. It could be led to some safer place not far away where it would be slain with no chance of interruption.

As he flew toward the log, the audacious Derry never slackened pace. To put all his fleet strength into the chase, to give battle, these were the only desires his madness had left him. Caution, unknown to any of the great-hearted clan of terriers, could never stay him now. To live gloriously and go down bravely was the only creed he knew. And sending him on and on was that strange urge which was in the earth smells and the tang of the autumn air, the urge which had lured him back to the wilds from which he sprang.

When the cougar had gone another half mile, it circled and crouched on a log past which its trail would lead the unsuspecting dog. The sounds of shouting had been left behind and now this chase would end. It was into such an ambush as this that the cougar had led the hound that morning, the hound who with muzzle to the ground had proved such easy prey. A noiseless leap, its tiger tusks crunching into the base of the neck and never a whimper would escape the dog in the frenzy of the kill.

But the Airedale did not trail after the manner of hounds. He did not rely entirely on his sense of smell, but keeping contact with the scent threw up his head frequently to look for the enemy. On a twisting trail he would have over-run where a hound could have followed unerringly. But here the trail was straightaway and so it happened that, looking up, he saw the cougar for the second time.

His gallop changed to a headlong scamper as he rushed at it. His body came closer to the ground, his paws beat a soft staccato; with every bound a yip, now hoarse, now shrill, told the cougar of the dog's invincible resolve. The beast's paws shifted, its smooth muscles under the hide of its haunches stiffened and flexed as its body came taut for the leap. It gauged time and distance unerringly, leaped—and missed! In that split second between disaster and survival, Derry swerved with startling abruptness. Even as the great pads struck the ground he shot inward, nipped

the cougar's haunch and cut away before the lightning paw could slash him.

As he got clear, that same hoarse gasp of defiance left his throat. The cougar crouched and wheeled, but never for an instant did Derry slacken pace. In and out he raced, circled, feigned, leaped clear and swept in from behind. In all his headlong maneuvers there was no sign of hesitation, not one misstep. The constant change of front, the shifting distance, gave the cougar no chance to leap. Faced by this enemy unlike any it had ever known, the killer's boldness dwindled and it looked uneasily for some loophole of escape.

It leaped sideways, whirled and bounded for the nearest tree. Hardly had it cleared the ground before Derry was below it, leaping, clipping his strong teeth threateningly as the enemy went higher. Then he sat and pointing his muzzle toward the sky, barked his deep-pitched call of victory. A quarter of a mile away Neal heard it and answered with a shout.

Ten minutes later a rifle cracked. Its echoes volleyed back and forth across the valley and the cougar lay limp and harmless at last beside the tree. From the lean upper air the clanging of a wedge of those restless migrants from the North again came down. But now it raised no response in Derry's heart for the phantom desires had faded into the past whence they had come.

CHAPTER XIV

REBELLION

NIGHT had fallen when Neal hooked his ponies into the light wagon and started for the settlement. On the straw of the wagon box lay the blood-stained body of the tawny killer, who would terrorize the valley no longer, and leading the way down the dark road proudly trotted the terrier who was responsible for the kill. The little procession of triumph was just coming out into the cottonwood flat from the denser gloom of the evergreens when Derry, sighting a vague form walking swiftly toward them, barked aggressively. He made as if to run forward to challenge the newcomer and then halted abruptly. His tail went down, trouble clouded his eyes, and the dog who unaided had faced the cougar, made as if to slink off into the roadside brush. He, who would go to meet any enemy undaunted, was cringing now from a sense of his own guilt. Though he had caught no scent of the oncoming man he knew the footsteps on the rutted road to be his master's.

As he came closer Ed saw his dog cringing at the edge of the salmon berry brush. "That you, Neal?" he called to the man in the wagon. "Sorry that free-an'-easy pup of mine gave you—"

"Nothing to be sorry about," Neal sang out. "If you don't believe me, come have a look-see in the wagon."

As Ed walked past the pony, Derry came slowly at his heels. His head was down but his drooping tail wavered with a faint hope that his master might yet forgive his transgression. When Ed Sibley leaned over the wheel and by the light of his pocket flashlight saw the great body lying there he turned quickly to the rancher. "Son-of-a-gun!" he exclaimed wonderingly. "Tell us what happened."

"Ask your dog, Ed. He was follerin' me home, and I was trying to keep him to heel, on account of not knowing where the big cat might be. Then when we struck the heavy timber back here a-piece, he gives one yip and lit out for the side-hill. You kin search me what happened for the next half-hour or so. But when I come up to him again he was back on the mountain and that cougar was up a tree and the dog had him hollerin' for help."

"Y' ain't joshin'?" Ed asked. He tried to keep his voice even, tried not to betray the excitement which had seized him.

"Joshin'? Say, if I hadn't happened along about then, ten to one that Airedale would have started climbing the tree. He sure was rarin' to get that critter."

Ed turned to where Derry was standing disconsolately behind him. For a moment he looked down at

the dog who twice that day had been a runaway, the dog who not only had evaded the restrictions his master had placed on his conduct, but who had even left the man he had elected to follow out of town. If Drummond or any of the strict disciplinarians among the Comet crowd were in his place, Derry would be punished for this. But for Ed Sibley, impulsive, erratic perhaps, but above all intensely human, there was only one thing he could do. He squatted on his heels and pulled Derry to him. There was rough affection in his grasp, but Derry, still remembering his disobedience, would not meet his master's gaze. Then the tone of Ed's "Huh! Forget it, son" reassured him and he pressed his body close against Ed's chest and nudged him fondly with his head.

Ed gave him an understanding pat and stood up. "Look, Neal," he said. "I wish you'd do me a favor—me and Derry."

"Shoot. The pup has the keys of the blinkin' city to-night."

"Well, in a day or so when the bunch comes back from the coyote hunt, just soft pedal that part about Derry runnin' away on you. Even after him getting the cougar there's one or two of that outfit couldn't see anything else to it but that he did it against orders."

"I get you, boy. Trust me."

Later that night when Neal gave a detailed account of the hunt to the group of loungers in the big room at the hotel, he carefully avoided mentioning just how

it was that Derry started on the cougar's trail. And in the days which followed it was generally understood around town that Neal had rashly sent another man's dog into danger. But even though he knew this, Neal held his peace. It was sufficient for him that his stock could graze safely in his clearing and he was more than willing to have criticism rest on his broad shoulders in return for what Derry had done for him.

When Hoskins, Olson and the rest returned from their coyote hunt, Derry seemed to them the same irrepressible youngster who had been on the verge of rebellion in his determined efforts to follow them the day they left. By all outward signs he seemed the same, yet deep within him his battle with the cougar had worked a subtle change. Playful as ever though he seemed, in his sober moments there was a half-hidden suggestion of a new intentness, a secret watchfulness in his acceptance of the ordinary things and happenings around him. Friendly as ever, joyous in his frequent moments of sheer delight in the simple fact of being alive, he would sometimes check himself in the act of some trivial enjoyment. With head outthrust and tail aggressively erect, he would pause and look about him, sobered by some purpose which he scarcely realized. Not even Ed himself knew it, but since that grim encounter, the fighter and the hunter within him had been awakened, never to completely sleep again.

So, if some of the Comet crowd put two and two together and from hints they had heard, surmised that

the Airedale's battle with the cougar had not been in actual accordance with his master's orders, they held their peace. Derry, who had come to town as a helter-skelter terrier pup, seemed somehow to have matured during these last few weeks. Whether or not he had disobeyed Ed on that memorable day, the fact remained that he had treed the tawny killer and that was enough for most of them.

Nevertheless they were surprised when Ed announced his intention of working Derry on the ducks the morning that the season opened.

"Better come with me, Ed," Hoskins advised when he heard about it. "I'll let him work with my old dogs till he gets a good notion of what's wanted."

"Don't worry," Ed rejoined. "He knows what's expected of him when the old twelve-gauge opens up. This summer when I was watching those fishery fences I shot lots of saw-bills and fish-eating ducks. He fetched them out for me. I've kept him retrieving—sticks and things. When I tell him to bring 'em, he's wise all right."

Hoskins tried to make the youth realize that this could by no stretch of imagination be considered sufficient training for any young dog, however smart he might be. But Ed, who since the cougar hunt seemed to think that Derry was capable of almost any feat, would not admit that his dog could fail him. So when the long-looked-for shooting season opened, Ed and Derry went out alone.

In that little town west of the Rockies the first day of the duck season was informally a holiday. Its observance had become almost a ritual with sportsmen. They put on canvas coats with vast pockets, sling tried and worthy guns in the crooks of their arms and calling excited dogs to heel, set out for the Big Slough before the day begins.

This year they were on their favorite stands an hour before dawn dissolved the waning moon. With collars turned up they stood waiting for the first swift flights. Beside them crouched their dogs, some old and wise, some, like Derry, out for their first real work. The mature retrievers eyed the frivolity of the others with sorrow and reproach. A rolling roar shattered the expectant silence and the shoot was on.

Derry was alone with his master on a reedy point. Blurred, whistling forms rocketed overhead but the first few flights passed out of range and Ed had to hold his fire. Then a broken flock came out of the grayness straight for them. Ed fired a left and a right but because of eagerness failed to give them sufficient lead and the birds, swerving, sped on unscathed.

"Should 'a' downed a brace of them," Ed muttered as he snapped open the breach and reloaded.

Derry looked up quizzically when he heard Ed's voice. Whatever his master might think, for him this was all good sport, and the barking reports of the guns around the slough were all part of the fun. When Ed fired both barrels in vain at a pair of widgeon angling

low past the end of the point, Derry broke cover and yipped excitedly.

"Lie down," Ed commanded. He was irritated, for Olson on the point opposite had already brought down three ducks and through the haze of dawn he could see the ferryman's old spaniel bringing them in from the reed bed.

Derry, chancing to see a flight coming from behind, paid little heed to the command. It was sharply repeated and the dog compromised by sitting. "Pull yourself together, mister," Ed warned and reached to bring him into the blind. In doing so he missed a splendid shot at the flight which Derry had been watching.

"Ain't I ever going to get a bird?" Ed exclaimed, hurriedly pressing the dog's hind quarters down. Derry sensed the annoyance in Ed's voice. Somehow he felt he was the cause of it. His ears drooped but his chin was up. He refused to cower.

Then Ed winged a mallard drake. It glided swiftly downward, its wings stiff and set and immediately it struck the water it began to swim for cover. Ed, who very much wanted that duck and who also hated to let a wounded bird or animal escape, fired as it swam away but the pellets did not lodge in any fatal spot and the drake reached the shelter of the reeds.

Ed sprang up. "Go get it," he whispered. "Go get it, Derry."

The Airedale bounded forward, leaping happily at

his master's waving arm. Ed urged him forward and he splashed into the water until it came to his black and tan shoulders, then turned again to watch the uplifted hand. He knew Ed wanted him to do something and he was trying his best to discover what that something was. But his brief experience with the saw-bills on the island in Sockeye Creek was not even a memory now and he did not connect all this excitement with the mallard.

"Go on now. You know what's wanted," Ed urged. He did not want Olson to hear of this. He had boasted of what the Airedale would do this morning, Hoskins had cautioned him not to expect too much but he had persisted in trying to work the dog. If Derry let him down now some of the Comet crowd would not allow him to forget it.

At first Derry was puzzled but when his quick intuition told him his master was inwardly angry, he splashed ashore. His tail was clamped tightly down but there was dourness in the set of his ears and jaw.

"Come to heel," Ed rasped. He would have liked to shout the command but a shout might have announced his failure. He must bring Derry into the blind again.

Derry did not run as Ed came to get him. He knew of no wrong he had done. If Ed had thrown a stick he would have splashed out into the slough and brought it back, but he was positive no stick had ever left Ed's hand. Each time Ed reached for him he sidled out of

reach, resolved to take no undeserved punishment. He looked over his shoulder, his eyes clouded, not with mute appeal or abject terror, but with questioning bewilderment. Ed could not catch him for at each step Derry withdrew farther into the marsh grass.

"You're making it worse," Ed warned and, balked, returned to his blind.

For half an hour Derry sat in the fringe of grass clumps thirty feet away. He shivered and felt bleak and miserable. A flight passed high but he avoided following them with his eyes for somehow he sensed that they were to blame for his unhappiness.

Once he edged forward in the hope that he would be forgiven but his master did not see him and he was too proud to come groveling to him. Then at last when Ed looked behind him Derry had gone.

"Quit me, eh?" he mused bitterly. Now he could not hope to hide his failure from the skeptics at the Comet.

That morning when the shoot was over he would have avoided the garage and the oldtimers who had gathered there to compare notes on their morning's successes. But he had to go to work—he had to face them.

"I wouldn't care so much about him not workin'—if only he hadn't quit me like he did." Because of his great liking for the Airedale he had never even admitted to himself that such a thing could have happened. Always before wherever he went Derry also came; never once had the terrier left him on a hunt of

his own free will. But quitting! To the young frontiersman this was the unpardonable sin in dog or man. He did not know that in Derry's troubled mind it was the realization that he was in disgrace for some reason unknown to him which had sent him from the slough to seek his kennel at the house.

"Well, Ed, how's Derry work?" Hoskins asked cheerily as he came in.

Ed was wondering how to avoid a direct answer when he saw Drummond looking at him with amused intentness. "I saw something looked like an Airedale cahootin' it for home when I was at the slough," he grinned.

Ed knew his secret was out.

"He—he quit me," he admitted soberly as he pulled on his overalls. Then he turned his back on them all and busied himself at the work bench.

CHAPTER XV

DERRY HUNTS ALONE

After his bitter disillusionment at the Big Slough Ed's attitude toward the Airedale underwent a change. There was nothing planned or deliberate about that altered relationship; the dangers and the life in the out-of-doors which they had shared made renunciation of the youth's loyalty to his dog an impossibility. Those were things whose stirring recollections could never be blotted out by succeeding events. They were memories to be cherished because of the troubled days which seemed to lie ahead. For Ed, Derry's desertion at the Big Slough that morning was an unhappy omen of the wider separation which seemed inevitable. During his wandering life in settlements and over far trails in the mountains, Ed had always cherished the hope of some day finding a dog to share his hard, adventurous life—a staunch-hearted comrade who above all else would be loyal to the death, a one-man dog who never could be separated from him.

Like most men of action Ed Sibley loathed sentiment but like most of his kind he had a deeply sentimental side. And during the summer which was gone he had all but convinced himself that in Derry he had found the sort of dog on which his heart was set. Try as he

might, Ed could not hide from himself the unanswerable fact that Derry had twice deserted him; once on the day the cougar was killed and again on the morning of the duck shoot. Months ago he had been warned that the Dalmadge Airedales were not one-man dogs. He had scorned the notion then but now he had to face the truth.

All too well he knew the treatment most of the Comet crowd would have advised to check Derry's growing independence, but he could not bring himself to curb the Airedale's high spirits by weeks or months of rigid discipline. Like many men who have dwelt alone in places far from civilization and from others of their kind, he had evolved some unusual philosophies and one of them was that between a man and a dog worthy of the name the "owner and master" attitude should give place to a more friendly relationship. "After all," he argued, "if my dog won't do what he knows I want him to do because he likes me—if he won't do it through love—I'm not going to make him obedient by fear. I don't give a hoot for obedience of that sort."

This was the reason that, after Derry left him at the slough, Ed did not punish him or confine him to the yard on Balsam Street. Derry came and went as before. But partly because Ed was unusually busy at the garage and partly because he felt Ed's altered mental attitude, Derry was often for hours in places his master knew nothing about.

The river and the woods above the settlement at-

tracted him. More and more as the weeks of autumn passed, he felt a distaste for the confines of the little town. And while Ed worked long hours to get through the season's work in time to locate on a trapline Derry reveled in the freedom which he could gain so easily.

It was his fondness for this solitary hunting in the valley bottom a few miles up river from Twin Forks that brought him late one afternoon to the tracks of the young black bear.

The two-year-old black had come down off the high benches where the last of the season's berries had ripened. For week after week he had been plodding the sunlit patches, methodically stripping the branches of their fruit. When they had ripened on the warm slopes of a side-hill facing the south, he had enjoyed the leisurely certainty of such forage. Before that he had roamed the timbered bottom land and had lived on whatever he could find. But this was precarious hunting. Ever since he had come from his winter den in the hollow of a cloven cedar he had been hungry for the taste of flesh. Instead he had been forced to go to the sun-warmed low ground and dig the skunk cabbage's warty roots from the black mold. He had found food of various sorts to keep him well conditioned until the first of the berries ripened. Once he had come upon a coyote with a freshly killed fawn. He had managed to intimidate the killer and had feasted well. But now he was on his way to the greatest feast of all the year, the feast of salmon at the river.

It was while he was on his leisurely way to the river that Derry came upon his tracks. The terrier had followed a disused trail which angled away from the river. After he had followed it for half an hour he cut across country, moving farther and farther in the deep woods until, rounding a fallen log, he came upon the fresh scent of bear. He looked alertly along it and saw where the bear had torn the rotted wood to burrow in the ground and woven roots in search of a mouse's nest. Derry saw the ruined nest, a ball of fluffy shreds gathered from the inner bark of cedars. He too had burrowed after mice and he knew the difficulty of capturing the inmates even when the nest was found. They would scatter, run between his feet, and though he would plunge and spank the scattered earth with his paws some usually escaped him. Digging out mice was small sport. With his thoughts on the fish awaiting him, the bear had not stayed here for long, and after sniffing about the excavation in the manner of an expert in such matters, Derry had set off along the black fisherman's winding trail.

The sun was setting when Derry reached the river bank. Under the drooping boughs of a huge spruce tree the black bear had pawed over the needles and unearthed a few bleached heads and back bones left there since last autumn when as a year-old cub he had shared this bed with his mother. He remembered how it felt to crunch a salmon's back between his eager teeth. He remembered how his mother would make him sit motion-

less on the bank while she stood with the fast water swirling around her firmly planted legs. Then her front paw would flash down and a salmon would come spinning to the low bank. She would sink her teeth into the struggling fish and carry it to this bed under the big spruce while he ran close beside her snuffling and licking the cold slime from the twitching, wide-spread tail. But now his mother had left him and he must catch his own salmon.

Derry did not seem impressed by a creature who, according to the signs, spent its time in burrowing for mice and in uncovering fish bones from among the needles. He circled, picked up the young bear's track again and started down the river bank. Before he had gone a hundred yards the bear's tracks entered the water. Derry raced up and down the bank but could not pick up the trail again. The bear must have crossed to the far side of the river. He waded out on a riffle until the cold water almost swept him from his feet. He whined impatiently, and then turned back. From the first he had not been greatly impressed by this bear who seemed to content itself with such small game.

When Derry reached the dry gravel bar he shook the water from him in flying drops, ran back and forth to get the chill from his legs, flirted his tail and looked down river. A small cutthroat trout below the riffle threw itself clear of the water. The evening was very still. The river smell mingled with the pungent damp-

ness of the low shaded ground. The unbroken mumble of the tireless stream was all he heard, that and the dragging note of a varied thrush who had not yet migrated southward with its fellows. Then as the dog started along the gravel bar his ears caught the sound of a clear-cut plunge, the sound of a leaping salmon. He galloped to the bend and looked down stream past where the river swept, coiling and foam sprinkled, into the circling waters of a broad pool. He watched and suddenly the surface parted in the middle of the pool, a red arrow shot upward in a graceful arc and smote the still water with its side. Its falling body hit the water as sharply as a beaver's tail. Instantly the terrier felt a strange vibration from within the pool. It was the sound, often too low pitched for human ears to hear, that great schools of salmon make when they break and scatter suddenly across the bottom.

With forepaws in the water, Derry leaned forward and watched the lazily widening ripples from the splash. His black nose tip twitched and a memory of the sockeye salmon schools at the head of Twenty Mile Lake came back to him. These were coho, a later running salmon, but just the same he would like to catch one. He retreated to the dry gravel and gazed reflectively at the pool. Yes, he would very much like to catch one.

At the lower end of the pool the hurrying water was constricted by a point of tumbled rock. Years ago the river had undercut the low hill and a landslide had come

down. Bowlders and gravel had partly dammed it and on the downstream side of the point were shallows of loose pebbles such as spawning fish need. This place was called "the Green Slide" by the settlers. Derry skirted the shore, and as he reached the shallows he saw an excited coho wallowing in a few inches of water. He plunged in, seized it and though its thrashing body almost tripped him he dragged it safely to land.

Hardly had he killed it when a scent came out of the underbrush along the bottom of the slide. It was an animal scent he had never experienced before and immediately he turned away from his prize with the hair on his shoulders erect and bristling. From the deep shadows of the alder and vine maple thickets there came a steady swishing of brush. And then a huge grizzly came swaying onto the open stretch of gravel.

Though he had never seen a grizzly before Derry knew that here was a creature more formidable than any he had ever encountered. The old king of the river saw him but did not stop for a second in its confident advance. Derry barked but, faced with so mighty an adversary, retreated. The grizzly paused, growled a savage warning and when he found Derry's salmon he held it with one immense forepaw and ate greedily. For one foolhardy moment Derry seemed to be going to advance and dispute possession of his fish, but now, while the shadows deepened and river's song seemed to increase in volume with the approach of night, he knew he was helpless to avenge the bold theft.

Keeping at a safe distance he prowled in the shadows and then as night came on, departed.

Next Saturday afternoon Ed did not have to work. He had had word from Eric Anderson, his trapping partner of former winters, that he had finished his season's work as tallyman at a salmon cannery down at the Coast, and that he would soon be coming into the upper country to go to work on the trapline he and Ed were to be partners on that winter. Ed knew he should use this bit of spare time in getting their outfit in readiness. Andy was to go into the hills a month or so ahead of him while Ed helped Hoskins with the last few jobs of the season. There were snowshoe frames to make, rawhide to cut and use for filling them, and a dozen other tasks which should be done at once. Sometime soon he must get a day off and go down river to the Indian reserve to buy enough moose hide babiche for the toe and heel filling on their long Babine pattern snowshoes. But when a prospector came to the Comet that Saturday morning and reported having seen the tracks of an immense grizzly near the Green Slide Ed told himself these mundane jobs would have to wait. He was anxious to try out his new sporting rifle. And besides he had never shot a really large grizzly. From what the prospector had said, this one near the Green Slide might yield a record hide. If he didn't get after it at once some one else most certainly would. There was no time to waste.

Directly after lunch Ed started. When he came out of the house with the rifle Derry pranced before him, dodging, lowering his head waggishly between his paws, eloquently asking to be allowed to come. Ed hesitated. This was to be a still hunt. He would have better chances of success without the terrier. If he had been a trained bear dog it would have been different. If he could even have relied on Derry's obeying him there would be no harm in allowing him to come. Ed could imagine the Airedale launching on some noisy hunt of his own at the crucial moment. No, his chances would be better if he went alone.

"Nothing doing to-day, mister," Ed said firmly, and shut the gate upon the eager dog.

But when he had gone the length of the front fence, he knew his resolve was ebbing. Derry whined so piteously, there was so expressive an appeal in his brown eyes that Ed stopped and looked back, indecisively. Now there was desperate hope in those shrill whines, Derry barked cajolingly and Ed turned back.

"You win, y' old blarney," Ed grinned despairingly. "Come on, I'll give you one more chance." He spoke lightly, but in his heart he knew that should he fail this afternoon because of Derry's disobedience, Derry would never be allowed to make another important hunt with him again. To the chances of the grizzly hunt he was deliberately adding this further uncertainty.

When he saw that he was actually being allowed to come, Derry was wild with delight. He trotted beside

Ed, head and tail ridiculously high, capering at his unexpected release. They went up the street, past the few scattered houses and turned along the upper road.

This narrow, unused wagon trail angled across the face of the Green Slide on moss-grown cribbing. The alders and vine maples were thick below it right to the edge of the bar. At first they hunted the high levels of the slide and the flat above it, but Ed was confident that the grizzly was near the river for the express purpose of fishing. Like all other fishing bears he would have one or two well used places where he could come to catch the salmon. The base of the Green Slide was the most favorable fishing ground on the river and Ed was practically certain that the grizzly would come down from his hidden resting place before sunset.

He posted himself on the downstream end of the bar behind an upturned stump which had lodged there in freshet time. He insisted that Derry stay beside him for he knew it would not be long before the grizzly came.

"Won't have long to wait," he told himself, trying to suppress his excitement. On the slide he had come across the grizzly's track, and the upper end of the bar itself was thickly trampled. It was a wide track, the largest Ed had ever seen and by the depth to which the pads pressed into the sand Ed knew the bear was a huge one.

The late October sun was dropping behind the ridge on the opposite side of the river and the salmon, scarred

by their long struggle from the sea, were wallowing closer in to scoop hollows for their nests among the gravel.

Derry watched them intently, then glanced at his master to see if he could get away to go after them.

"You stick with me, see?" Ed whispered tersely. He looked at the dog and as he glanced upstream again he saw the grizzly!

It was already clear of the brush below the slide and was shuffling toward the water, its hulking shoulders high against the background of rapids where the river curved around the base of the slide. Its ruffled neck was lowered as it walked easily toward the fishing place.

Cautiously Ed raised himself on one knee, slid the black, tapering barrel of the new rifle over the edge of the stump, pressed off the patent safety catch and, taking careful aim, fired.

The grizzly lurched. Ed stood up to fire again and in an instant the king of the river was only fifty yards from him, charging, bellowing its hate, its cruel mouth agape.

To Ed things seemed to happen jerkily, like motion pictures when pieces have been cut from the film. First he saw the enraged grizzly charging, and as he fumbled wildly with safety catch and trigger, the picture flickered and there was Derry rushing like a black-and-tan fury straight for the charging silvertip.

Derry, the dog who had yielded ground to this huge beast a few days before, was the attacker now. His

great spirit, untamed, rebellious though it often was, now knew one thing and one thing only. Ed Sibley was in danger and that above all else was the thing that mattered.

As Ed tried in vain to fire, his fingers seemed numbed by the frightful suddenness of the assault. They fumbled with the trigger while he saw Derry leap with suicidal rashness straight at the bear's throat. A great paw flashed up and threw the terrier against a log of driftwood with sickening impact. Ed saw him, still unbeaten in spirit, scramble to his feet and begin to hurl himself into the hopeless fight again. This time the grizzly was ready for him and Ed knew that when the blow fell his dog would never rise again. His flame of panic passed. Derry was gathering himself for that last fatal leap when the high-power rifle spat and the grizzly crumpled to the sand with one quick, expiring grunt.

The few ineffectual lights of Twin Forks stared at the vast night high above the little frontier town when Ed Sibley left his aunt's house and started down the street to the Comet. Derry, the flesh wound on his shoulder bandaged and comfortable, lay at home and the sleeves of Ed's hunting coat were stained as if he had taken something red and wet and held it close within his arms.

CHAPTER XVI

FACING THE TRUTH

It was after midnight when Ed Sibley parted with old Sandy Hoskins at the doors of the Comet and started homeward down the deserted street. He had found his employer alone in the garage and as he had poured out his story of Derry's heroic intervention in the battle with the grizzly he had made no attempt to hide from the kindly oldtimer all the hopes he had held for a real comradeship between the terrier and himself.

"He saved my life, Sandy," he declared with pride and exultation. "Whatever he does after this can't change that. Now I don't give a hoot what Drummond and that gang of knockers say about him."

"I been thinkin' a lot about that Derry dog these last few weeks," Hoskins told him. "Now he's growin' up, he makes me think of an old cross-breed I had up in the Stikine country twenty years ago. I never tamed that dog, Ed. Never did see a critter so fond of his own way as that lad—almost like some humans in that respect. But when it came to the pinches—when I'd got myself into some jackpot and needed a bit a' help, well that old Hyak dog was johnny-at-the-rathole every time. In the end he got tired of my way of livin'. I was freightin' at the time and he reckoned there

wasn't enough excitement in that for him. One day he give me a long look and off he went. Never set eyes on him again. Some folks tried to say he quit me, but I never looked at it that way. Nope. He had his way of livin' and I had mine. The two didn't go together so he just dissolved the partnership and set out on his own again. Why, for all he left me I always claim I never had a better dog than old Hyak."

"I don't figger Derry'll ever leave me outright like that—" Ed began.

"I hope he don't, son. It gives a man a queer feelin' when an old dog that's mushed the trails with him decides the time has come to part. When old Hyak pulled his freight it was a nasty jolt for me. I fancy I can see that same independent streak in your dog. But suppose this winter, or five years from now he goes off on his own—that don't allow folks to say he's not a good dog. You bet yer boots it don't."

Ed started to speak but Hoskins detained him.

"Let me tell you something, Ed. You know that spaniel I got now? Fellers say he's smart and faithful and all the rest. The wife's got him trained to fetch my slippers and do a pack a' parlor tricks like that. He knows how to retrieve as well as any of 'em. But say, I'd trade him and a dozen like him to have old Hyak back again.

"Dogs are like humans, Ed. Some play a lone game and some are content to follow. Old Hyak thought everything out for himself. This spaniel's con-

tent to do what I tell him. A feller can pick up dogs of most breeds like him pretty near anywhere. But the Hyaks and the Derrys—they're few and far between. Mebbe when you have 'em there's times when you want to cuss 'em for being so fond of their own way. But later when they're parted from you, a feller forgets all that and on'y remembers the big an' brave things they did. I tell you, Ed, it's a mighty big compliment for a man to have one of that sort say he's worth travelin' with for a year or so."

"I know what you mean by that," Ed admitted soberly. "When I'm off in the hills with that dog I can pretty near guess what's in his old bean. A feller sort of feels what he's thinkin' about when everything is so still and there ain't no humans within a dozen miles." He paused and then burst out: "That's the reason I won't train him like Drummond and that bunch want me to. You talking about that dog in the Stikine country and your spaniel sort of makes it clear in my mind what I've been thinkin'."

"I know folks'd laugh if they heard me sayin' this, Ed, but it's the truth. Some dogs are just plain hypocrites. You take a cat now. Fer meself I don't like cats much. But there's that about 'em. They ain't hypocrites. Most of 'em only use us as a meal ticket but they don't come tee-heeing round at feedin' time like dogs I've seen. Fawnin' and wriggling was left outa their box a' tricks. When they've got their meal they let you know you can go chase yourself. Too

much blarney about some dogs. I've seen panhandlers an' tinhorns round mining camps just like 'em in that respect."

"That dog of Drummond's now," Ed suggested. "He don't like Drummond. But because he comes a-runnin' every time he snaps his fingers Drummond thinks he's ace high with his dog."

"He obeys because he's scared not to. But believe me, Ed, if he had Derry or old Hyak he wouldn't be able to keep a dog for five minutes. Ever see a dog show downright contempt for a human? I have. If they shouted it right out they couldn't make their meanin' plainer. Drummond and some more of them would think I was crazy, Ed—but your way of handling Derry is better than theirs. You may lose him but even if you do you'll have known what it means to have a dog for partner—a *dog*, Ed—not a boot-lickin' flunkey like that spirit-broken thing of Drummond's."

Ed stood up slowly. In the shabby office of the Comet, alone with this old veteran of the trails and with the light of the oil lamp mellowing the homely furnishings of the little room, he had forgotten his customary restraint. "Some day Derry may quit me, like you say, Sandy," he began, and thinking again of the battle on the gravel bar that afternoon, an unaccustomed huskiness came into his voice. "But—whatever happens—after this I'll never quit him. I guess you know what I mean."

Hoskins nodded, then with a casual air he was far

from feeling he too stood up. "Time we was gettin' home for a bit of shut-eye, Ed," he suggested, as he turned out the lamp. But as they passed out the door he laid his gnarled old hand for a moment on Ed's shoulder and for the youth there was a world of understanding in the gesture.

"Night, Sandy," Ed tried to say.

"Night, Ed boy," Hoskins replied gently as they parted.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CALL OF THE HILLS

After his talk with Hoskins Ed realized what he had vaguely guessed before—that some day his relationship with the terrier would reach a crisis, that some day if Derry set his mind on leaving him he would be powerless to intervene. He had no way of knowing when the dog's passion for independence would forever end their partnership, but in the days which followed he insistently tried to make himself believe that should Derry leave him he would come back again. Groundless though such a hope might be, he dreaded to think of following those Northland trails without the Airedale for companion. Though he told himself that the terrier was not his slave, that after having saved him from the grizzly he could never demand petty obedience from him in the way Drummond would have attempted, the very fact that the dog saved his life increased his fear of separation. Somehow, in some way, he would keep the dog steadfast to him. And while there were countless little signs in Derry's behavior to warn him, he would not let himself give up hope. To keep the dog, to gain his enduring allegiance—this was a problem he must face during his strenuous winter in the distant hills.

For day after day the crisp fall weather lingered. Imperceptibly the mantles of snow on the green shoulders of the mountains along the river came lower, a coldly beautiful robe that lay lightly over the evergreens. Deer, mountain goats and, farther inland, the caribou and moose knew that the régime of summer had ended and that they soon must be subjects to a harsher rule. They sought lower feeding grounds. The philosophic bears shuffled sleepily to their dens.

The river was now a river of the dead. Silence reigned in place of the exciting days and nights when vast schools of homing salmon had spawned along it. All down the great river and to the sea the stir caused by the salmons' return to fresh water had ceased. The rambling, whitewashed canneries at the coast were boarded up, deserted by their fleets of fishing boats and tenders. In Twin Forks and in all the other scattered settlements along the railway preparations for the cold weather were afoot. Summer employment was nearing an end and in each isolated community frontiersmen were completing their plans for winter work. "Andy" Anderson, Ed Sibley's youthful partner, arrived in Twin Forks immediately his season with the salmon fishing fleet had ended. Ed had their outfit ready and, because no time should be lost, Andy had departed for the country beyond the Twin Fork range where Ed would join him later. There were many jobs to be done in that country sloping down into the valley of the Twenty Mile before actual trapping commenced,

but Andy was equal to them. He and Curly, his strong-limbed Irish water spaniel, left Ed and Derry in the settlement. Since they were partners, the money Ed would earn at the Comet was to go into the common purse. But had Ed Sibley had his choice he would have gone into the hills with the young Norwegian. Only his loyalty and gratitude to Sandy Hoskins kept him in the town until he was no longer needed.

While he was helping Hoskins with the last repair job winter came suddenly. One hushed night while the lake behind the town slept beneath the throbbing stars, the cold crept down and shackled it with ice. Ice also held the quiet waters of the river pools and draped itself in glittering spangles and festoons where the water danced against the faces of the rocks.

Then for days the snow fell. Branches overhanging the river sagged wearily under the load laid upon them until they could bear no more and their grotesque burdens fell without sound into the black, hungry water. The gloom beneath the miles of evergreen forest seemed strangely contrasted with the increasing carpet of white. The storm clouds lifted, the sun shone cold and bright, the Comet was closed for the winter and Ed could go now to the hills and the woods which had been calling him. One morning, long before sun-up he and Derry bid good-by to the little town which still slept between the sheltering mountains.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BOND OF BATTLE

Snow lay deep in the low divide between the Twin Forks range. Every bough was weighed down by it, so that the stunted evergreens grouped disconsolately about the irregular caribou meadows stood wrapped in greatcoats of white like sentries that had been posted there long ago and forgotten for eternity. The trees, the broken sidehills and the austere peaks above, seemed hostile to any living thing that dared invade this British Columbia solitude, but Ed Sibley mushing northward through the range with Derry at his heels, had neither time nor inclination for such poetic fancy. His heavy pack hunched high, his long snowshoes lifting and crunching steadily, he was intent on reaching the trapping cabin before the winter dusk came down. And Derry, tingling with anticipation, was thinking of the hot supper he knew would be his after his long day's work.

"Only two hours more, old pup," Ed encouraged while they stopped at the summit for a breather.

Derry, dangling a moist tongue, displayed his splendid teeth in a waggish grin to say the prospect pleased him. He sat back, lifted a forepaw and nibbled the lump of hardened snow which had lodged be-

tween his toes. Then he rose, shook himself, flirted his tail and looked to assure his master he was ready for another go at it.

For the first time in his life, Derry carried a load. Every pound of grub which could be taken over that difficult trail from the settlement was precious, and across his back, just behind his sturdy shoulders, was slung a twenty-pound sack of cornmeal.

Ed shifted his load and started from the summit. Derry swung into the trampled snow behind him, taking care to keep clear of his master's snowshoes. Earlier in the day he had inadvertently trod on one of them and Ed had stumbled and given him to understand the seriousness of such an offense. They crossed the last meadow and headed down the long slope into the valley of Twenty Mile, until they found the creek channel. They followed this until dusk and then Derry's keen nose picked up the scent of wood smoke. He paused and lifted his muzzle to test the air with snuffling inhalations. Five minutes later they rounded a bend and came upon the squat cabin nestling on the bank beneath the dark green trees. Derry barked and Curly, the Irish water spaniel, came bounding through the snow to meet them.

At the sound of the bark the cabin door flew open and Andy, a frying pan in his hand, appeared.

"Well, I'll be—!" he began, grinning from ear to ear. Ed dumped his pack, untied Derry's load and followed him into the cabin.

Derry, glad to be out of harness at last, rolled luxuriously on the hard snow. He arched his back, drew his forelegs close against his black-and-tan chest, and writhed, making odd little noises of satisfaction. Then he rose, shook himself vigorously, and moved to greet the strong-limbed pup sitting uncompromisingly on the doorstep.

In his approach he observed all the formalities of the canine world. The set of his head, his eyes and waving tail announced that his intentions were friendly. He let it be seen that he knew he was the visitor here and made no claims to ownership.

But the Irish water spaniel coldly refused to welcome him. He knew the Airedale had come with a man who was a friend of his master's and that so far he had shown no desire to harm or appropriate any of the things over which he had constituted himself the guardian. But while Derry sniffed his muzzle he remained stiff, staring past him, making it apparent he had no wish to form a friendship. As Derry pranced and waved an excited signal of cordiality with his tail stub, the spaniel ignored him, turned aloofly and sat close against the door. It was an eloquent gesture of rebuff.

Slowly Derry's tail stopped wagging, his questioning ears went back and he stood motionless, staring at the other. His abundant amiability melted away.

He had no desire to force acquaintanceship. Some dogs, lacking his fine understanding, would have been

provoked to wrangling by Curly's actions, but Derry did not intend to quarrel. The spaniel was within his rights and he would respect them but as he went to stand beside Ed's packboard, his measured, stiff-jointed gait announced that he too had rights and would make very certain they were not encroached upon.

Each stood his own ground and eyed the other distantly. It was an odd meeting for two young dogs, separated by so many snowy miles from others of their kind.

Andy, opening the door suddenly, saw them and turned to beckon Ed.

"Look at 'em. Both being so polite and dignified it hurts. Wonder what's up?"

Ed peered over Andy's shoulder. "Don't seem to want to pal, do they?"

"Nope. Guess Curly's been playing a lone hand too much. Never figured he was a mixer but I thought he'd get on with Derry. Most any dog would." The cabin door closed and the two young dogs were left alone.

After they had been fed, Ed made Derry a good bed in the small lean-to beside the cabin. Curly slept in the kennel near the door.

Next morning before the full light of day had cleared the drab shadows from the winding forest aisles, the two men and their dogs started over the trapline.

Derry's spirits were brimming and he seemed to have forgotten his rebuff of the previous evening. He

plunged into the soft snow beside the trail and gave chase to a red squirrel. He knew quite well the absurdity of trying to catch it but chasing squirrels was a favorite game of his, and as he stood shoulder high in the snow with a patch of white flakes stuck clownishly to his black button of a nose, he barked for Curly to come and join in the sport. But Curly gave him a look, brief and distant, and kept diligently behind his master. Such frivolity was not for him.

"That pup should be in the comic strips," Andy laughed.

Ed grinned. "He's always pulling funny stuff like that."

"Too bad he and Curly don't chum up. They'd make a mighty good pair."

As they followed the line of blazes Ed and Andy took turns at breaking, for a foot of snow had fallen since Andy's last trip over the line. Each time they approached a "set" Ed felt a tingle of anticipation. Would the trap be empty, would it hold an ermine whose pelt was worth a dollar, or a marten that would bring them thirty dollars or more? At the end of two hours' mushing they had visited ten traps and lifted two ermines, then as they approached the next one Andy gave an exclamation of surprise.

"The pen's knocked down, Ed. Guess we got a marten there." He broke into a jog trot.

"That's marten work all right," Ed assented. The sticks and slabs of bark forming the pen had been torn

down and the little roof of brush on the crossed poles above it had been pulled apart. Andy fumbled under the snow for the chain and drew out the trap. Sure enough it had held a marten—but the marten was gone. Some robber had eaten the prize! Andy angrily circled the tree against which the pen had been built and discovered the tracks of a huge timber wolf.

"We got our work cut out now," he stated soberly. "We got to get that old pirate. I only hope it's not the same one that stole most of French Louie's fur last winter over on Whitewater."

"Hope not," Ed said quickly, remembering the stories he had heard in the settlement the previous spring. "Louie says he never made a cent after that wolf found his traps. He tried blind sets, and poison and hunting but it got clear."

While the two youths were rebuilding the shattered pen Curly sat down dutifully to wait, but Derry circled the tree and when he found the tracks of the lone wolf the hair on his shoulders rose and a growl rumbled deep in his throat. Andy glanced up quickly.

"Look at him," he whispered. "He savvy's wolf all right. Don't let him range far alone."

"No chance. That wolf could kill him like a rabbit."

When they started, after baiting and setting the trap, Curly rose to follow, but the wolf tracks held a strange fascination for the young Airedale. Ed's whistle brought him to heel but as they moved to the next trap, a third of a mile away, Derry repeatedly

looked back toward the place which held the scent of wolf. Gone now was his desire for frolic. He stalked in the snowshoe trail, tail up and head well forward, and once as the memory of the scent came strongly to him, he growled a deep note of challenge, so that Curly, uncomprehending, turned to look at him.

Through the dark tree trunks they saw that the pen and shelter of the next set had been undisturbed, but as they came nearer they found the line of wolf tracks swinging toward it from behind. The bait was gone. And on the trapline bait was precious.

"Knocked a hole in the back of the pen and lifted the bait. That's how Louie said he worked," Ed exclaimed.

By noon, when they stopped to brew the mid-day pail of tea, they had overwhelming evidence that the pirate who had sent French Louie penniless to the settlement the spring before had come down the range to match his wits against their skill.

Because of the delay caused by smashed pens and stolen bait, it was dark when they reached the bark shelter at the high end of the line where they would spend the night. From the traps they visited that afternoon two marten and five ermine had been pilfered.

"It would 'a' been our best day," announced the exasperated Andy.

"What we going to do?" Ed asked after supper, when, the night's wood gathered, they lounged before the big fire.

"We'll go after him tooth and nail, but old Louie's as good a hunter and trapper as there's in the country, so I ain't banking on our chances."

While they talked, the dogs drowsed with muzzles toward the fire. Curly slept placidly, only occasionally stirring to bask more thoroughly in the welcome heat. But Derry's sleep was troubled. At intervals his forepaws twitched as he coursed some trail of dreams, and as he closed with the phantom there, the hair on his shoulders bristled and strange, small noises bubbled in his throat, a wisp of what in waking hours would have been a lusty growl of rage.

Next day as they back-trailed to the main cabin they learned that while they slept the pirate had raided this end of the line again. From all of the thirty traps, except six on the end near the cabin, the bait had been cunningly lifted and three ermine had been stolen.

The wolf was too crafty to follow, or even parallel, the snowshoe trail. It swung wide and only angled to it in places where Andy had made the sets; then it turned away to come back unerringly at the next trap.

"He's got the traps located to a foot," Ed concluded, as after following the wolf tracks, they saw how accurately they led to each trap in turn.

Without his master, Derry made no attempt to follow the trail of the bandit. He seemed to know what both men knew—that here was an enemy more deadly to him than any cougar or even grizzly. It would be but the work of a moment for the wolf to kill any dog in the

country. His weight alone was four times that of Derry or the Irish water spaniel, and behind his strength were the swift tactics which in battle make the great wolf of the timber more than a match for any dog.

"He knows what's what," Andy remarked as they watched Derry pause, bristling, where the big tracks led from a trap. "He knows how much chance he'd have with that old devil."

That night the cold was more intense than it had been for weeks and when supper was over Andy called both dogs into the cabin to warm themselves before they went to their beds outside.

Curly trotted in and sat before the sheet-metal stove in the place which had been his on nights when he and his master were alone. But Derry, instead of entering, paused with his forefoot on the door sill, his tail wagging vigorously and a look of pleased inquiry in his eyes. Only instead of looking at either of the men, he watched the other dog.

"What you know about that!" Andy laughed. "He says he won't come in till we make it unanimous. You never mind old grumpy," Andy urged, and laid his hand on Derry's head.

The instant he did that Curly was on his feet, the flame of jealousy in his intent brown eyes. He did not utter a sound, but the tautness of his body was a warning which Derry understood.

If the young Airedale had been quarrelsome, the

fight would have started before either master could have jumped to intervene. But Derry knew that to the other dog, Anderson was sacred property. He slid his head from under the open palm and stalked into the black night outside.

Andy called to him, reproved his own dog, and went out to find Derry sitting stiffly on his bed under the low lean-to beside the cabin wall. He snapped his fingers, patted him, tried to coax him inside but Derry would not stir. He endured the touch of Anderson's hand but in no degree did he respond to it.

Ed came and when he reached inside the lean-to, Derry rose, nuzzled his hands, licked them, then rammed his head hard against his master's knees and exhaled with hoarse little sounds of affection. He let his master know, as plainly as if it had been put into words, all that was in his heart. When Ed thumped his sturdy ribs encouragingly, laughed at his sensitiveness and rumpled his fine head, his manner changed. His tail beat a tattoo of content against the wall, he prodded his master with a straight foreleg, gripped his wrist with mock ferocity, and when Ed went inside he settled himself happily upon his bed of moss. He seemed to have forgotten the undeserved rebuff.

But he had not forgotten. A moment later when Curly, in disgrace, was ejected from the cabin, he was on his feet, his eyes on his master's empty packboard standing beside the door. Had Curly offered to touch that he would have launched himself at his throat. But

Curly, as meticulous in avoiding things belonging to the masters of other dogs as he was in guarding the things that belonged to Andy, went directly to his kennel, lay down and presently when the sounds inside the cabin subsided and the candle was snuffed, he slept. Night lay heavily in the valley. An owl sweeping low, hooted eerily and from far down the creek a coyote sents its maniacal chantey upward toward the throbbing stars.

Curly was the first to awake. The drab fingers of the mid-winter dawn were creeping feebly over the rim of mountains to the southeast when he came from his kennel and went softly to the cabin door. Complete silence reigned within, and after a glance toward the sleeping Airedale half buried in the dry moss under the low roof, he started down the trail to the water hole in the narrow pool of the ice-fettered creek.

There was less of the night along that winding avenue than under the thatch of snow-burdened trees. The solitude was unbroken; no chickadee or snowbird piped its faint greeting to approaching day and in the unreal light of the slow dawn the creek between its flanking walls of trees seemed a vague and lifeless place.

When Curly had picked his way down the bank to the level of the ice, a great form flitted like a specter across an opening between the tree trunks on the bend upstream. It paused, moved and was gone, and then Curly near the water hole saw a shape lope easily to the open snow above the bend. He stopped in his tracks,

ignorant of the nature of this ghostly visitor. Then as he watched, the visitor stopped also and Curly heard a low whine of invitation. The timber wolf leaped aside lightly, started back, looking over its shoulder and again Curly heard its whine—guarded, insistent, enticing.

The gray wolf had planned this greatest coup as craftily as it planned its raids on traplines. Covertly it watched the cabin; one bound would take it into the shelter of the trees at the bend and in spite of its pose of playfulness it was ready to flash away. Twice in hunger-ridden winters years ago it had enticed young dogs to their doom. It had romped with them, drawn them farther and farther from the safety of their cabins, then in an instant its mask of friendliness had vanished and with one slashing lunge it had butchered them before a squeal of terror left their throats. For three nights it had lurked near Andy's cabin and now it knew its chance had come. Once more it sent its whispered invitation down the creek.

Curly, by nature serious-minded, was not easily beguiled. Nevertheless he was interested and in his mind there was no association between this great dog and the tracks of yesterday beside the traps. He moved up the ice a few paces, stopped and waited.

The wolf turned, circled as close as it dared, then trotted back, its bushy tail swaying. Curly walked forward, halted, then curious, advanced again.

The wolf was on the bend of the creek and Curly was

moving closer to it when Derry, rising from his warm bed to stretch, saw the two figures below him. For a long moment he stood moveless as a statue, then he bristled and his black lips lifted to display his gleaming teeth. Suddenly he wheeled, raced behind the cabin and started at full speed along the snowshoe trail which paralleled the creek. He passed above the bend and as his feet left the trail and he struck the soft snow, his ringing barks spread the alarm to the sleepers in the cabin.

Curly had been lured out of sight of the cabin and the gray pirate was trotting confidently toward the cover of the evergreens when a black-and-tan fury confronted him. Before Curly's eyes the friendly playfellow vanished. The great head came down, its ruff rose and the two young dogs stood face to face with death.

Snarling, the wolf sprang sideways and ahead. His fangs raked Derry's side, Derry lunged, missed and wheeled to meet a cutting up-stroke at his shoulder. As the wolf flashed at him he swept low and seized a hind leg but his enemy's strength was too great and he was dragged off his feet and towards the jaws that came at him. The fangs were reaching to tear his throat out when he lunged desperately and gained a momentary hold high on the gray neck.

The instant that hold slipped he would be killed. The wolf reared and thudded him with terrific impact to the ice as it tried to twist so that in one swift, fatal

crunch it could sink its teeth into the small of the Airedale's back. Even Derry's strong jaws could not withstand those mighty struggles and as he hung perilously Curly stood and watched the fearfully one-sided battle.

The young spaniel could have turned and sped down the ice to safety. At no time was he fond of fighting and in the presence of so terrific a foe even a quarrelsome dog would have retreated in panic. He knew that Derry was on the verge of death, he had no great liking for the Airedale and yet in this crisis he realized which was friend and which foe. He and Derry were members of that clan which thousands of years ago had deserted the tribe of wild things for the cave fires of men and ever afterwards all their kind had been outlawed from the four-footed brotherhood. The fangs of the wild hunters had been against them; together they and Man had fought the wilderness, and now before him that fight was being waged again. Some instinct slumbering deep within him roused and without a sound Curly leaped and drove his teeth through the tough hide of the enemy's haunch.

The wolf bounded mightily to shake itself free. The instant either dog released his hold the other would be at the mercy of the killer. But neither bore the brand of the betrayer. They could not win, at any second now they would be sent spinning and helpless to the snow, but they would face defeat together.

Curly's teeth were being torn free when the dogs

heard the thud of running feet on the ice. Blinded by the gray hair neither of them saw their masters but even in the heat of that tremendous conflict they recognized those footfalls, the footfalls of Man, their ally since the world was young. There was a shout, a rifle cracked and the wolf sank dying to the snow.

Hands dragged them off and voices, elated and wild, assured them the victory was complete. Then as they moved off toward the cabin, the Airedale and the Irish water spaniel trotted flank to flank, for now—by the bond of battle—they were friends and brothers of the mountain trails.

CHAPTER XIX

A MAN'S JOB

Ed Sibley had been reared close enough to that vast country beyond the frontiers of far Northwestern settlements to know what sort of work he was undertaking when he went out into the hills to win a living for himself. He knew the traditional carefree existence of the trapper was attractive. He also knew it was a myth.

Like all real trappers he knew the grueling work he must face during those active months far from civilization. Several winters' experience had taught him he must endure hardship, solitude and long grueling days on heavy trails. To break trail hour after hour through new and sometimes sticky snow; to back-pack heavy loads, to make camp after winter darkness had overtaken him; to cook his own meals and occasionally live on short rations when game was scarce, these and other tests which nature imposes on the men who venture far to win a living from her, he was prepared to face. Like most others in the Twin Forks country he knew that the man in search of soft living should never turn to trapping.

Yet in spite of the hardship, he liked the life. It had for him a zest and an allure not to be found in the

secure life of the towns. He found a primitive satisfaction in making his way through that difficult country, in exploring valleys and the sides of mountains as yet unnamed. Most of the creeks and the dozen little lakes that fed them were not shown on the sketchy maps of that part of the province. On the map the country between Twin Forks and the valley of the Twenty Mile and far to the northward was only an irregular patch of white. A few dotted lines showed where it was surmised the headwaters of the streams lay but surveyors had not yet been sent in to chart the country. It was a great, unpeopled, waiting land, and Ed Sibley, in the musings which come to every pioneer, sometimes felt a warming, secret pride in knowing that the trails he blazed, the routes he explored and marked, some day would be roads or even railways. He knew oldtimers in Twin Forks who had chosen routes for their trails which the railway followed now. Here, like them, but a generation later, he was scouting before the great army of homeseekers that would some day pass this way. But of the untold thousands who would come to know these rich valleys he was the first—he and Andy pushing on alone in the vanguard of the pioneers.

After Andy had turned over to him the end of the line which the pirate wolf had followed, Ed extended it for several miles into what promised to be exceptionally good marten country. After two unsuccessful attempts he found a feasible way through a range of wooded hills which saved him miles of back trailing and consequent

loss of time. Like every trapper he disliked a line with a dead end, and by means of this wooded pass through the hills he was able to set a new line on its farther side and by swinging to the right across miles of flat country he formed a triangular route which he could cover, with favorable weather, in two days. The bark shelter which Andy had made at what was formerly a dead end now served him as a stopping place. Sometimes when there was new snow or when warm weather made the trail sticky Ed could not travel that far. At such times he and Derry camped in the snow.

For the first time in many weeks the Airedale seemed supremely contented. The long days of travel, the constant change of scene seemed to satisfy his roving disposition. After a few sharp lessons he soon learned that the bait in the traps was not to be tampered with. For a week Ed had several "blind sets" made in front of the regular sets to outwit a wolverine whose trail he had seen and who he feared might cause trouble. Even these hidden traps did not deceive the terrier. He would pass close to all the other pens but his unerring memory, or his scent, always warned him of the blind sets and he kept well away from them. Even after the wolverine disappeared and the blind sets were lifted, Derry was very particular not to approach the places where they had been placed.

Only once did he get completely out of hand. The cut-off which Ed had found over a low place or "saddle" in the ridge of hills followed a small creek bed

almost to the summit. One morning, soon after they left the bark shelter and were heading up this creek, Ed came upon a deep, rounded trail. It looked almost as if a small log had been dragged end on through the snow but Ed, seeing the occasional hind paw marks, knew immediately he had found the tracks of a pair of otters. So far as he knew Derry had never seen otter tracks.

"Here, pup, come and have a sniff," he called.

Derry who was exploring a patch of scrub birch on the off chance of finding a willow grouse, replied with a sharp bark. In a moment he came plowing out of the brush. He had been running hard and the heat of his body had made the snow stick to his coat. He was almost completely powdered with white and only his black nose and snapping brown eyes showed through the ridiculous disguise.

"Y' look like something off a Christmas tree," Ed jested. "Come here and let's know what you think of this."

Derry plunged ahead to where Ed had stooped and was pretending to burrow in the snow, but as he scented the otters his jauntiness vanished. Instantly he was transformed. His ears went down, he growled angrily and with tail erect and the hair along his back rising, he plunged into the fresh tracks. He followed them in the wrong direction for about twenty yards, then whirled about and dashed past Ed who called in vain to bring him to heel.

Ed had seen Derry wildly excited many times but never had he seen the savage eagerness of the hunt possess him so completely. He knew that the Airedale had been evolved from the otter hound and several other breeds, but he had never dreamed that the instincts of the former would have persisted to so overwhelming a degree.

"Be hours before I set eyes on him again," Ed thought, when after shouting in vain for Derry to come back, he heard his shrill barks becoming fainter until finally they were lost completely in the stillness of the hills.

All that morning Ed followed the tracks of the otters and his strong-willed terrier. He wasted no time in baiting the traps between the valley bottom and the summit, but hurry as he would he could not overtake the dog. Ed knew that otters sometimes traveled over high country in their long patrol along the frozen creeks and he wondered anxiously how far Derry would trail them before he came back. A pair of otters cornered were dangerous fighters. Once he had come between one and the water. It had charged ferociously and only a quick shot had saved him from attack.

But as he started down from the saddle along what he had named Six Mile Creek he was relieved to see that the trail was leading straight for the larger stream below. There was plenty of water in the pools beneath the ice of this big creek and if the otters could get that far before Derry overtook them the terrier would

probably abandon his chase. The short afternoon drew to a close and when dusk came Ed made camp near the creek. He was finishing his supper when Derry walked into camp, completely fagged and with a guilty look in his brown eyes.

Ed could not find it in his heart to scold him. "'Tain't your fault if that otter hound streak got the best of you," he told the tired dog. "But to-morrow I'll make mighty sure you keep to heel until we're miles from this crick."

They reached the main cabin early in the afternoon and found that Andy and Curly had already come in from their end of the line. As he kicked off his snowshoes outside the door and unslung his pack, Ed noticed that Curly was lying in the gloom of his kennel. He saw Derry trot up to greet his friend and though he noted Curly's indifference he thought no more about it for the moment.

"What luck?" he shouted to Andy who was busy in the cabin.

"A brace of marten and some weasel. Lucky enough that way. But Curly—take a look at him."

While Andy was coming to the door Ed turned and tried to coax the Irish water spaniel out into the daylight. But he would not stir from his bed and it was not until Andy brought him out that Ed saw what had happened. The poor spaniel's muzzle and throat, even his woolly chest, were fairly bristling with porcupine quills.

"Son-of-a-gun!" Ed exclaimed. "Some of 'em are pushed in right to the hilt. He's in a bad way, Andy."

"Yep. I should get him out to town. Should start to-night before he stiffens up."

"Guess he could make it in easy stages. How'd it happen?"

"Just rotten luck, that's all. Thought I had him wise to porkies. He's often seen 'em but except for the odd quill or two he was never hurt. Here just after dinner when we were only a mile or so from home he rushed full tilt around a big rock and slammed right into one. I knew there was a porky hangin' out in a big spruce that stands beside it. He's got his den in a hole under the rock. Anyhow Curly got enough jabs to make him fightin' mad and he tied right in. Think I could make him quit? 'Twasn't till I'd killed the porky that he'd let go."

The boys had planned that Andy was to go out to Twin Forks before Christmas for supplies and mail and, if he could pack it, some reading material. Curly's misfortune made an immediate start advisable and that evening soon after the moon was up, Andy set out. Derry whined appealingly as he saw Curly led slowly away across the moonlight to where the shadows of the forest waited. He understood that his comrade was in trouble.

"Guess it's good-by till spring for your woolly side-kick," Ed told him. "He'll pull through. Sandy'll look after him till then."

Four days later Andy came back alone. Hoskins had worked hours over Curly and had removed the last of the quills but it would be weeks before the dog would be equal to the hard life of the trapline. On the night of Andy's return he and Ed sat up until long past midnight while Andy told of all the happenings in the little settlement whose life they knew so intimately. The only news of unusual interest was that Bert Olson's cabin down at the ferry landing had been broken into and robbed while the old man was absent on his annual trip to the distant Coast City, the Pacific terminal of the railway which passed Twin Forks.

"O' course there's folks that blames the Indians for it," Andy commented. "But some always do that first shot outa the box when they hear about a robbery. They took his blankets, every pound of grub he had in the place and his rifle. Drummond says nobody but an Indian would pick things like that but most of 'em thinks it's some crooks that must of been hoofin' it along the railway. They'd need stuff like that so's they could den up in the hills somewhere."

"Sure. The Indians been knockin' round the Forks ever since I can remember but they never took anything. Losin' all that outfit'll give old Bert quite a setback. Guys that'll pinch stuff from a poor oldtimer must be pretty low."

Next day the boys separated for a week. The marten were running fairly well and each wanted to prospect some lakes and sloughs in readiness for beaver trapping

in the latter part of the winter. They spent Christmas and New Year's Day together at the main cabin and then returned to the hard routine of their lines. Each week the cased skins carefully stored in their little cabin increased in number, each week the prospect of a profitable winter's work became brighter. And then, not from love of the sport but from necessity, they were forced to take time from their work and make a hunt together.

CHAPTER XX

THE GREATER HUNGER

One evening Ed shoved his tin plate from him, swung his legs over the bench of poles and reclined against the edge of the cedar slab table. "If that's supper—I've had it," he remarked dryly. Since he was doing the cooking at the main cabin for both of them that week, he could be candid about the meals.

"Fed up with the little white bean, eh?" Andy grinned as he drained his tea mug.

"Beans, sourdough bread, bannock, dried vegetables and evaporated fruit—I can't look any of 'em in the face much longer. I want to sink my teeth into a chunk of fresh meat. Venison say, or a juicy caribou steak. I could scoff one—hoofs, hide and horns."

"I've a hankerin' that way myself. We're meat hungry, that's what wrong with us. We must get game somehow. Seems like a month since we've had a bite of fresh stuff."

"Deer and the odd caribou seem to have cleared right out. We'd have to travel a long way now for game."

"Not for mountain goat. It's a pretty safe guess that two days' mushin'll take us to a band of 'em." Andy took the basin which served as bread tin, cooking utensil and dishpan from its peg on the cabin wall and

while they washed and dried their tinware they talked about Avalanche Pass.

"You know that deep draw past the east end of my line? It heads right through the range and up it a ways. It looks like a regular winter hangout for goats."

"How far you been up it?"

"Only a mile or so. Would 'a' gone farther but the weather turned a bit soft and it doesn't look like a healthy place when the snowslides begin to tear things loose."

"It's wild looking country, judging by what I can see of it from the saddle above Six Mile Crick. Guess it's safe enough in cold weather though."

"Well, what say, Ed?"

"Can't you see me waterin' at the mouth?" Ed rejoined as a peremptory scraping of blunt claws on the cabin door told him that Derry was impatient for his supper.

Ed threw open the door and stood holding the pot of cornmeal mush. He peered to left and right for Derry's plate but as usual it was nowhere in sight.

"See here, old laddie," he told the prancing Airedale. "This business of using your plate for a plaything's getting a bit thick. I'm tired of messing around in the dark every night for it."

Derry leaped, planted his forepaws on Ed's sweater and gave him an admonitory push for his delay in producing supper. He knew where his plate was. It was

at the side of the cabin half buried in the snow where he had left it after a frolic that morning. It was an entertaining toy, partly because it clattered so loudly when he struck it and partly because it had a scent reminiscent of bygone meals. Now, as usual, he expected his master to search for it while he jostled him and reveled in the hot odors from the pot. As Ed stood on the doorsill he urged him with a yip to commence the nightly search.

"Nothing doing, son," Ed said. "You go get the plate yourself." Of late months Derry's trick of bringing his plate had been discarded but Ed knew he had not forgotten it.

"Your plate. Go get it now." Ed urged and waved Derry on with the half-filled ladle.

Derry understood perfectly what was wanted but, because of his happy-go-lucky independence, that did not necessarily mean he was going to do it. He bounded, landed stiff-legged, glared to either side of him, indulged in the exaggerated buffoonery of looking into the darkness of the boughs thirty feet above his head as if suggesting that his plate had gone to roost up there. When he saw that his master remained on the doorsill, he raced around the cabin, passed within six inches of the missing tinware and presented himself at the door to report that the lost simply would not be found without assistance.

"Forget the comedy," Ed insisted. "Plate, see? And make it snappy."

The tone of Derry's bark changed. "Oh, plate?" it implied. "Why didn't you say so the first time?" He raced around the cabin, scampered past the door and made a second circuit in breathless haste as if the plate had been transformed into a remarkably fleet snowshoe rabbit he was doing his best to overtake.

"No plate—no supper," he was reminded. That warning had always had the desired result when, in puppyhood, Derry tried to evade performing the trick by some diversion like this.

Derry disappeared around the corner of the cabin and came back immediately with the plate dangling ludicrously from his mouth, one gleaming fang hooked under the fold of its rim, his lip lifted in a provocative grin.

"Bring it along, funny-face." Ed dipped the ladle in the mush.

For answer Derry tossed his head, flipped the plate into the air and as it came down batted it with a straight foreleg and sent it spinning into the deep snow. He placed his head between his forepaws and barked vociferously, turning to send an impish look toward his master. "That plate's a bad actor," his bark hinted. "Can't make it behave at all. Come and lend a hand."

"Bring it here," Ed warned. Now that he had given an order he must not be beguiled by Derry's cajolery.

"Don't try to laugh it off. No plate—no supper, so hurry up."

Suddenly Derry's barking ceased. The light of fun faded from his eyes and was replaced by a glint of sullenness, an impersonal, stubborn light. He turned his back on the plate and stalked to his kennel. Carrying a plate was a trick he had outgrown and sooner than perform it he would forego his supper.

Ed peered into the shadow of the kennel. Derry's head was up, one shoulder awkwardly protruding, his eyes half closed. Like most dogs in that Northland country, he was fed only once a day. For twenty-four hours he had slept and worked in the keen air. He was hungry, but rather than obey a simple order he would stay hungry. Ed would have liked to overlook the disobedience and heap the plate but he knew his authority had been challenged. He stepped back, shut the door and left Derry supperless in the cold night.

"What you know about that?" he said to Andy.

"Laid his ears back, eh?"

"One time before he went like that on me. I can't whip him. I did it once—and only once. He looks fair at you and you can see plenty plain what's in his old bean. 'You can pound me to a pulp,' he's thinking, 'but I'll never give in. You can kill me first.' Then maybe next day he'll do what you want him to without being asked."

"He don't look like the sulky kind."

"No, and I don't want him to start. I'd 'a' got the plate myself, but how could I tell he was going to get

bull-headed about it? And now, worse luck, I got to make him get that plate if it takes all winter."

After the candle had been snuffed, Ed lay in the top bunk thinking about his Airedale. In spite of his antics and his clownishness, Derry was sensitive and proud. Much depended on the outcome of this unexpected trouble.

When Ed came out of the cabin next morning he was relieved to see that Derry showed no signs of resentment. Instead he was reveling in the game he had each morning with the pair of Steller's jays who were keeping themselves fat on the trifles of food they found or pilfered at the cabin. It was a contest in which Derry rushed back and forth trying to keep the jays from alighting near the door. At times when the blue-crested raiders outwitted him they jeered raucously. Derry enjoyed the contest but when Ed appeared he called it off with a derisive yap and bounded along the waterhole trail to overtake his master.

Ed dropped the pail and turned. "Hello, oldtimer. No hard feelings, eh?"

For answer Derry leaped, prodded Ed's chest, seized the handle of the water pail and tried to make off with it. Ed recovered it and they raced to the frozen creek followed by long-drawn jeers from the jays on the cabin roof.

Ed hoped Derry had forgotten the incident of the plate but that evening, after a hard day running the short end of the trapline and baiting up in readiness

for the goat hunt on the morrow, he learned that Derry had by no means forgotten.

Before he and Andy had their supper, Ed brought the cornmeal outside. Derry, without food for forty-eight hours, came to meet him at the door, his nose twitching in ecstasy at the warm odors rising from the pot. Ed patted him and pointed to the plate lying where it had been tossed the previous evening.

"Bring it over, old son, and we'll fill 'er up," he urged cheerily.

He was not going to be too insistent to-night. If Derry brought it halfway, or even less, he would feed him. It was a compromise none of the dog fanciers in the settlement would have made, but sooner than risk Derry's affection for him, he would make it.

Derry looked up at him intently, soberly, a tremor of anticipation in his shoulder muscles.

"Good dog, get your plate." Ed was almost coaxing now.

Derry's ears flattened and he looked steadily past his master into the gloom-wrapped evergreens. He craved food and he knew that by surrendering he could get it. But that he would not do. Scornfully he walked to his kennel and lay down.

"It's up to you, son," Ed said, chagrined. Derry was leaving him no alternative but mastery or complete submission.

Next morning while Andy lashed their outfit to the broad-runnered sled Ed gave his dog another chance.

He was inwardly dismayed by the change which had come over Derry during the night. This morning he took no heed of the squawking jays, nor did he so much as glance at either of the men. When the pot of meal was brought out and he was asked to get his plate he rose and sauntered out of sight behind the cabin.

"You got to see it through," Andy advised.

For answer Ed picked up the plate and pushed it under the lashings of their load. He intended that move to show Andy he was firm as ever but in his heart he knew different. Not even his partner could guess his deep affection for the terrier, and sooner than forfeit that he would humble his own pride. To-night, after a hard day on the trail, Derry must be fed, for between himself and the high-spirited dog were things which dwarfed the petty demands of discipline.

Derry did not appear until they had slipped their moccasined feet into the snowshoe lashings and had started eastward with the sled. Then he sat near the door to watch them go. Ed beckoned to him and called his name but he would not make one step toward them.

"The rebellion's spreading," Andy commented. "Looks like he's made up his mind not to do anything you tell him."

Ed knew what some dog owners would have done. They would have gone back and thrashed a dog who acted this way. But the bonds between him and Derry were founded on comradeship, and friendship—not fear—and he did not want any dog to stay with him

merely because it was afraid to go away, and Derry feared no man. If Derry would not follow of his own free will he could not use force. As the trail curved and the snow-burdened boughs shut out their view of the cabin, Ed felt he was losing something he valued above all other things. But there was nothing he could do—the time for reconciliation had gone by.

As Derry saw them swinging down the trail, his forepaws shifted nervously, and when the evergreens hid them from him a thin whine quavered between his black lips. He who had always gone with them so zestfully was now held back by stubborn pride.

Repeatedly the jays on the cabin roof taunted him, but for half an hour he sat moveless, never turning his eyes from where the trail disappeared at the mouth of a tunnel of spruce boughs. And then, head low, tail drooping, as if ashamed of his weakness, he rose and trotted stolidly along the snowshoe tracks.

As the sun mounted that cloudless sky, the eastward sides of hummocks and of the rounded loads the drooping branches bore, became dazzlingly white in contrast to the bluish shadows which lay in every depression of the billowing snow. A raven on a dead tree above a rock bluff croaked its welcome to the warming light. A flock of garrulous cross-bills swept from tree to tree in search of cones. The keen air was exhilarating but for Ed the day was darkened by the somber shadow of misunderstanding.

At noon the hunters left the wide valley and struck

upward around the shoulder of the mountain flanking the east side of Avalanche Pass, and late in the afternoon they started easily downward to find a safe camping place in the heavy timber. From the high ground they could see line after line of peaks furrowing the horizon toward the North Pacific coast, and while the purple shadows lengthened, the sun drew bold brush strokes of rose and gold across the distant slopes of snow. Night came quickly down over that vast, unpeopled land while they were making camp and with it came the reluctant Derry who all day had followed them unseen, drawn after them by some strange longing whose power he resented but was not able to resist. He edged toward the fire without looking toward them and sat dourly beyond its farther side.

The sight of the black and tan figure hunched at the edge of the circle of dancing firelight was too much for Ed.

"Discipline be hanged," he muttered and rose quickly. He would tell the old duffer to forget it, would fondle his ears, pat him and then when they were friends again he would give him all he could eat.

He stepped around the end of the long fire of jackpine poles and reached out his hand but before he could lay it on Derry's head the dog got up and stalked out onto the snow where he sat deliberately with his back to the fire. It was a rebuff more eloquent than words!

Ed straightened. He found he was suddenly angry.

"All right," he said slowly and resumed his seat under the canvas shelter.

His resentment lasted only a moment. "Guess I'd feel pretty crusty myself if I'd missed the meals he has. Andy, I'm going to feed him."

"He's your dog, Ed. It's up to you." Andy liked the Airedale but to himself he thought, "If he was mine I'd make him meet me half way."

Ed tried to hide from his partner his unsettling fear that his offers of conciliation would never be accepted. And when he put out the food he saw his worst fears realized. The dog would not come to it and at dawn when Ed rolled out of his sleeping bag to stir the fire, he saw Derry had not relented. The food had not been touched.

For Ed this seemed to spell the end of his months of association with the Airedale. This resentment was to be permanent, he could never win back the affection of his dog. Derry might never leave him as Hyak had left Hoskins, but he would lose him just as surely. The thought of that loss loomed ominously over the prospect of the goat hunt.

Though they were taking enough grub for two days, they hoped with luck to make a kill before dark. "If we can't make it back here to-night we can camp on the trail," Andy said as they prepared to camp out. "And if we don't get a shot to-day we'll be all set for a good hunt to-morrow."

They were well into the Pass before dawn broadened into day. Derry followed them slowly, barely keeping them in sight. On both sides of them the flanking mountains rose steeply and what stunted timber grew there reached upward between the swathes cut by avalanches of former years. The frowning peaks a mile above them were capped with great combs of drifted snow. Hour after hour they traveled, one pulling and breaking while the other on the improvised gee-pole behind kept the sled from lodging in the sides of the deep trail. Following them was Derry, a solitary dot upon the snow.

It was a mid-afternoon before they saw the first deep furrow made by a mountain goat wallowing through the snow. The track was old. "Looks like we'd have to camp on the trail," Ed said as he moved ahead to take his turn at breaking.

Andy did not answer. He was looking intently up at the winding avenue of sky between the mountain walls. A heavy scud of cloud was rising rapidly above the peaks to the southwest and along the leeward edges of the snow combs a whirl of fine snow hung like fog. "Listen," he warned.

From the gaunt galleries of the crags a mile above them an eerie sound came down. In the bottom of the pass the air was heavy, motionless in the gray light, but up there a gale was moaning, eddying around the up-thrust buttresses of granite. While they stood listening an errant puff came down to them and its

touch, by comparison with the frosty air, was startlingly warm.

They wasted no precious time in talk. Neither was a *chechahko,* they knew the peril of being caught in such a place as this while the Chinook, more dreaded in the North Pacific mountains than the fiercest blizzard, was sweeping up from some storm center in the south, fanning the snow to treacherous softness, cutting the frost which held it precariously to the smooth rock faces. They knew the devastating power of snowslides which swooped like solid tidal waves. In that droning chant of the elements high above them and in that hot gust they read their warning.

"Lucky it didn't catch us asleep," Andy grunted as they turned the sled around and started back. Derry, stepping out of the trail to let them pass, seemed puzzled by this unexpected move. "Better stick close," Ed warned as they jogged past. Derry did not look at him, but glancing behind Ed saw he had started to follow.

As they crossed the foot of the first slide course they watched the comb at the top of the tremendous incline. When it became sodden and heavy it would break, roll down, perhaps start all the countless tons of snow below. Every comb was a potential avalanche.

The wind, which had first come in squalls, had increased to a gale. Now it brought a pelting rain, warm as a summer shower. The dusk was thickening rapidly, the snow became sticky and balled up in the weave of

their shoes until main filling and babiche sagged with the dragging weight. At dark, from somewhere up the Pass, came a muffled rumbling like a train careening through a tunnel. It ceased abruptly and they knew the first of the slides had swooped.

"We got to run for it," Andy exclaimed tersely. He was ahead now, pulling the sled. Ed shot a glance backward and was relieved to see Derry at his heels. As he faced ahead he saw Andy lurch, stumble and pitch for twenty feet down the steep side-hill. When he tried to stand his left leg gave with his weight and he crumpled to the snow.

"What's wrong?" Ed shouted above the moaning of the storm. Andy seemed not to hear him. "What's wrong?" he repeated as he slid down the bank to where Andy was vainly trying to rise.

"Ankle—wrenched."

In Ed's mind those two words reared a great fear, stark and towering. Aghast at what this might mean he caught Andy's arms and staggered up with him to the trail.

"Don't be a fool, man," Andy protested. "The jig's up— You beat it—"

"Shut up," Ed snapped as he dragged him onto the sled. He threw off his mitts and drew his skinning knife to cut several lengths from the lashing of the load. Behind him in the dusk and rain Derry stood watching, unconcerned and aloof.

Ed ran to him, dropped on his knees and circled the

rain-drenched shoulders with his arms. "Boy, you got to forget. . . . You got to work for me now. . . . Without you . . ."

Above the Chinook's turmoil they heard, far up the pass, the sound of a second slide's ascent. "We're done, Derry boy . . . if you won't forget." Blindly Ed scrambled to his feet, carried the Airedale bodily and setting him down before the sled, knotted the improvised harness across his sturdy chest.

He swung about and seized the gee-pole. "Mush, Derry!" he shouted and as the command left his lips he knew that on his dog's response depended the fate of his crippled partner and himself, for alone on that uneven, sodden trail his progress must be fatally slow.

For a moment Derry, awkward in the rope harness, stood motionless, and Ed, watching him through the tortured seconds, dared not repeat the order. In his master's face Derry saw a tenseness it had never borne before, the voice was taut with high excitement and he saw Andy strangely prone upon the sled. Suddenly he threw up his head, barked sharply once, then lunged forward. The traces snapped tight. The sled was under way!

During those fearful hours of dark while they fought their way down that gorge of death, much that happened along each hard-won mile seemed to Ed unreal, like the events of a hideous dream, but standing clear and vivid above all else was the sustaining knowledge that the dog was really his friend again, that he and

Derry were making this great fight together. In the darkling squalls he could not even see the Airedale's striving back. Handicapped though he was by his hunger weakness never once did the dog lie down to rest. His sure feet kept to the trail, guiding the sled at the turns, keeping it from overturning, preventing a score of delays any one of which might have brought death swooping on them. Once when the dog staggered Ed made him stop for a precious moment, but even then Derry took his rest standing up, leaning forward in the traces, head down, panting hoarsely.

Once above the wind, above the groaning of the storm-tortured trees, above the babel of the shrieking Chinook, Ed thought the end had come. Down through the night, seemingly from directly above them, they heard the swelling, vibrant thunder of a snowslide gathering speed. Sight was useless, the slide might be coming directly for them. The ground trembled, they might be running toward some less dangerous place within a strip of timber or heading into the path of that solid, tossing wall of snow and bowlders. But it passed behind them. Once they dragged the sled up and across a slide which had buried their trail under twenty feet of hard-packed débris.

Rain streaked Ed's face, the salt of his sweat was on his lips, its sting in his eyes. No sound came from the toiling Derry now, as they struggled on toward safety. Then unbelievably the long nightmare ended, they reached the heavy timber and their camp.

Ed kindled a roaring fire and cooked a pot of food—their own food—for Derry, exulting in the wild extravagance that prompted him to stir into it most of their bacon, half their raisins, a goodly share of sugar. As he worked, Derry sat beside Andy licking his chest where the improvised collar had rubbed his hide. When the food was hot Ed whisked it from the fire, set it down and turned to go for the plate which Derry had scorned the day before.

Derry stopped licking his tousled coat, eyed his master for a second, then leaped past him. Now he was at the plate, he had it in his teeth, he dropped it, sent it scuttling over the snow toward Ed, pounced on it and would have picked it up when Ed lunged for it.

"I'm going to *help* get that plate, oldtimer," he said huskily. "If you can forget a grudge I guess I—" Andy resting easily on the blankets knew by the unfinished sentence that his partner was midway between laughter and tears.

"Derry don't go in for fancy tricks, Ed," Andy said. "But he's there in the pinches—every time. Wish I could tell him he saved my life."

Derry, hearing his name, wagged acknowledgment with his tail stub and looked up quizzically with a lump of meal dabbed ludicrously on his black nose. Then he grinned across his plate and turned the tenseness of that moment of drama into broad, irresistible burlesque.

CHAPTER XXI

THE OUTSIDE

Spring had come like a great release to all the valleys leading into the vast area drained by the Twenty Mile River. Blue grouse sent their mating calls booming along the slopes and below them in sunny openings between the tall evergreens the wing beats of male willow grouse vibrated the bright air like the roll of primitive drums heralding the season which had at last usurped the power of austere winter.

Twenty Mile Lake, an avenue of clean blue down the center of the long valley, had broken its ice fetters the week before. Along its shelving beaches the down of catkins garbed swamp willow clumps and where the sunlight pierced the thatch of boughs, skunk cabbages had pushed their bright green cones through the dark earth. From rim to rim the valley and all the living things it held had responded to the stirring summons of the spring.

Andy and Ed Sibley had also heard that summons. For weeks before they had traveled swiftly over the crusts which set each night and at mid-day when the increasing warmth of the sun softened this crisp coating on the snow, they called a halt. The days were lengthening rapidly; though Andy's ankle was almost

better, it was not yet equal to heavy snowshoeing. But by keeping on the trail from the first streak of dawn until about ten in the morning, calling a halt until about three and then moving ahead again until dusk, he was able to work all but the extreme end of his line. At last the time came for them to lift their traps. Each day they packed a load back to the main cabin, oiled them and hung them up—in readiness for next season. Their bulky catch of fur was baled and, packing only outfit enough to take them out to the railway, they made everything secure against the pack rats, greased the stove, capped the stove pipe with an old lard pail, shouldered their packs and started—hours before the sun was up.

"So long, old shack," Ed grinned.

"See you in the fall," Andy grinned. "You ain't much for looks but you kept us warm all winter."

Derry, however, had no time for such sentimental pleasantries. New scenes, new country, new acquaintances, these were what his restless spirit craved, and from the preparations he had seen made he knew they were not coming back to the cabin.

Because of their weight of fur and Andy's tender ankle the boys had decided to head down the valley to the shores of Twenty Mile Lake. On one of his last trips across the saddle at the head of Six Mile Creek, Ed had climbed a rock bluff from which he could see the big lake far below in the main valley. The ice was going even then and they knew that by the time they

got there, the lake and its outlet river would be open. Two days' travel would take them to an Indian village, several members of which Ed knew. There they could hire a dugout canoe and with luck be out to the railway in, at most, three days.

Their plans were carried out and on the third morning after leaving their trapping ground they and Derry were on their way down the sparkling lake. They were on their way to "the outside!"

The river draining the lake was swift but only once were they in any immediate danger. This was when they chose the wrong channel where a low island divided the river. After following the left-hand and narrower channel for half a mile they found their way blocked by fallen trees and sweepers and had to turn about and work their way back to the head of the island. A huge log jam left only a fifty-foot passage between it and the raw cut-bank they were following. Holding the canoe in the eddy below the wing of the jam they examined that difficult piece of water through which they had so recently passed. The immense tangle of driftwood shot the current sideways and it met the water which surged through the bottle-neck opening in a series of boils and cross-eddies. Ed plunged his pole into ten feet of water before he found the bottom.

"Goin' to be tricky," he shouted above the angry roar of the river.

"We'll get poling bottom by hugging the bank,"

Andy replied from the bow. "Got to make the turn snappy or we'll pile on the face of the jam."

Everything went well until they had worked the dugout to the junction of the two strong flows. At the elbow of the bank there was a big eddy and, taking advantage of this, they began to edge the canoe into the mill-race ahead.

Astern of them for a hundred yards, a line of maddened water fought the face of the jam. Both knew that should they ever be carried against that mighty sieve they would lose their winter's catch of furs, their outfit, and unless they leaped at precisely the right instant, their lives. It was an ever-present fact in their minds, it prompted each move they made but they knew better than let the realization of the danger loom large enough to make them lose their heads. Above all, each knew he had a partner upon whose skill and courage he could rely.

"Shoot, kid!" Andy shouted as he braced himself and started the bow into the rip at the edge of the main channel.

In spite of the danger a grin flitted across Ed's face at this flippant exclamation of his partner's. "Good old Andy," he thought.

Immediately the current rose snarling at the prow. Derry braced himself to offset the canoe's surging roll. Andy threw his pole to the left side, found bottom and held against the river with all his might. Then the canoe lurched sickeningly, water piled against their

quarter, Derry barked wildly. Andy's pole snapped under the crushing weight and they were swinging broadside to the jam.

"Let her run, Ed," he yelled.

Even as Andy shouted Ed's paddle flashed out. They fought desperately as the bow yawned into the mad stream. They were racing for the jam. An instant's hesitation, one wrong move would have added to the toll claimed by the hungry rivers of the North. They were racing to gain the rapids, to clear the face of the jam where the torn water sucked and leaped.

Twice they were shot so close to it that they were drenched with spray and both times only a shouted command from Ed saved Derry from attempting the impossible leap to the dripping logs. Then it seemed only a moment until they were clear and into the full sweep of unobstructed rapids.

Andy half rose from his thwart and looked ahead. From either shore crested waves angled out downstream to meet in a long tossing comb. They knew the canoe could not live on that, so choosing a course midway between it and the jam, they started down that plunging chute. Their paddle blades bit the water as they put more steering way on their native craft. At each of those crested waves the arched bow lifted up and up, the stern dropped menacingly and Derry spread his legs and crouched to keep from being thrown overboard. But they rode each one safely. They had defied the river.

That afternoon they crossed the immense whirling pool where the Twenty Mile emptied into the larger river which flowed past Twin Forks, thirty miles to the eastward. They cached the canoe where the Indian had asked them to and shouldering their packs followed the wagon road until it turned into Twenty Mile's one straggling street.

Ahead of them they saw the dingy signboard of the Silver King Eating House. They hunched their heavy packs and grinned.

CHAPTER XXII

EASY MARKS

LIKE the boys, Derry found the sight of even this humble civilization pleasing after his long sojourn in the wilds. He cantered ahead to herald their arrival by a rousing volley of barks.

From down the street his greeting was answered by three mongrel dogs which came threateningly toward him. They were not a prepossessing pack but they neither angered nor intimidated Derry, who, ready as ever to meet friend or foe, advanced with an erect, slightly wagging tail which was a signal he was prepared to make friends but was also prepared to stand his ground should they prove hostile.

Neither Ed nor Andy had ever before visited this shabby settlement which had been a boom town in railway construction days. They had heard oldtimers call it a tough place but then that was ten years ago and now, though it was unkempt, it seemed in no way to deserve the notoriety once given it from the Rockies to the North Pacific coast. Neither knew much about any of these raw settlements along the railway, for their native Twin Forks was a much older town. Like most others whose work takes them beyond the frontiers of civilization, they assumed that all were honest as them-

selves. They could not know that since colonization began its long march westward such settlements as Twenty Mile had been the lurking-places for those human prowlers who scheme to live softly off what hardy men have won by toil and courage. Like camp followers behind a far-flung army come the parasites coveting the hard-won spoils but not venturing into that stern country to win them honestly.

So as the boys advanced they thought of nothing but the meal awaiting them and watched nothing but Derry's meeting with the growling trio. "Guess the only tough characters left are the dogs," Andy remarked. "Better call him, Ed. Looks like that gang was aiming to jump him."

Derry now stood jowl to jowl with the largest dog, a heavy-tailed, rough-coated brawler, while the others, a black and a husky-cross, edged closer to his flanks. All three were growling while he kept ominous silence, his body set and ready, his gaze seemingly fixed on something far along the street. But no move of theirs escaped him and every line of his trim body warned them he would not yield a fraction of an inch.

The pack mistook this stern dignity for weakness. Their leader, ruff up, fangs bared, watched for an opening, while the others shifted nearer the Airedale who stood immobile, daring them to make the first move.

Ed knew that a shout now would betray Derry, whose silence and unflinching opposition were beginning to tinge his opponents' confidence with uneasiness. His

shoulder was a full two inches lower than that of the dog who faced him and either of the others were his equal in size and weight yet though they were three to one they hesitated before this hidden power which fortified the terrier. Each held back for the others to strike first and in that long moment of waiting their resolve dwindled and they growled more loudly to reenforce their flagging combativeness. They shifted uneasily and only the burly leader stood ready to fight.

Like a fencer that had awaited an opening Derry whirled broadside to him. The terrier had won the first phase of the encounter and now he would show this bully he could not be cowed by noisy threats. Ed saw his chance and called. Derry came, but he came reluctantly and by his slow gait and backward looks he made it plain that this retreat was none of his choosing.

"Forget that gang of roughnecks," Ed said. "Let's get on to the Silver King and wrastle with a big feed." But as they moved on, Derry's glances toward the three dogs who followed were a reminder that he had not forgotten.

They were about to turn into the Silver King when a man in mackinaws and shoepacks who was lounging in the door-way with a companion, gave them the disappointing news that the place was closed.

"Yer an hour early. The Chink don't open till six o'clock."

"Thought you were going to tell us he'd gone out

of business," Andy grinned. "Guess we can wait that long."

"Hankerin' to throw your feet under a table again, eh? You boys been on the trail long?" the other man asked.

"Three days since we left the trapping cabin."

"Had a good winter? Reckon y'did, judgin' by that pack. Yer lucky. Fur's hittin' the roof right now. Prices sky high."

"Fine business," Ed replied lightly and went on to ask where they could find a place to sleep. "It'll only be for the night. We're taking the train to the Forks to-morrow."

One of the men meditated. "They ain't no real stopping place but you could use one a' them cabins yonder," he said after a moment, jerking his head toward a row of shacks, deserted since construction days, which stood on the narrow ridge between the right-of-way and the gulch down which a creek made its noisy way to the river. "The roof's all right. Was lookin' it over the other day."

"Good enough," Ed said briskly.

"See you at supper time," the man in mackinaws replied as the travelers started toward the weather-stained shanty.

As they crossed the road, Derry eyed the three dogs who came circling behind him. He disliked their slinking maneuverings, their crafty attempts to catch him

off his guard, and although in obedience to Ed's word he did not drop behind he made it apparent that he was ready to meet them.

When the two young trappers were across the tracks the man in mackinaws turned his head slowly, looked at his companion inquiringly and waited. The other spat, grinned meaningly and grunted the two words, "Easy marks." Then he looked at the door and windows of the eating house, saw they were closed and moved to the outer edge of the plank sidewalk.

The pair sat down, elbows on knees, their low-pitched sentences coming as casually as if they were two chance acquaintances who were passing an idle hour exchanging commonplaces in which they had nothing more than superficial interest.

"We kin work that part of it easy's rollin' off a log," one of them muttered after they had conferred in undertones for several minutes. "I'll grab a boat and wait at the crick mouth in the big pool. Better have grub in case we got to lay low a couple a' weeks. But how about that dog? Looks like a scrapper."

"Scrapper?" repeated the other. "Sure he's a scrapper. I'll see he gets all the scrap he wants. You leave it to me." They got up and started lazily down the street toward the river trail.

An hour later Ed and Andy crossed the tracks and entered the Silver King. Through the uncurtained window at the end of the counter they could watch the closed door of the shack inside which they had left

Derry and their belongings. This was their first real taste of civilization in months and they meant to enjoy it to the full.

"What you going to have?" Andy asked, studying the soiled menu card he found propped between the pickle bottle and the stoneware sugar bowl.

"They got any kind of omelettes?"

"All kinds. All kinds of pie too. Let's have tomato soup to start with."

They gave their order to the Chinese waiter and while it was being brought several railway section hands came clumping in and took stools along the counter. With that easy sociability common to all frontier towns they were soon exchanging scraps of conversation with the boys, telling them who had won the Eastern hockey finals, about that young American who planned to fly the Atlantic alone, giving them newspaper accounts of many things whose outcome they had debated during long evenings at their fly camps and main cabin.

"We don't need the papers for sensations any more," one of the men said. "It's most died down now, but three weeks ago everybody was talking about what a couple of crooks pulled off up the line this side of Division."

"Not a train robbery?" the boys asked quickly.

"Nothing so fancy. They bust into an old feller's cabin, beat him up, pinched his last pound of grub, took what money he had and beat it. Real bad, bold men, them two."

"Sounds like the same gang that robbed Olson up at the Forks. Pretty *cultus*," Andy exclaimed.

"I'll say it was *cultus*," the section foreman, an Irishman, agreed. "I knowed that old man near Division—fine and a grand old-timer he was, that never did harm to a living soul. Always ready with a hand-out for any down-and-outers beatin' their way. We had a Mountie up here but he hadn't much to go on. I'd give a month's pay to see them pinched."

While he was talking, the man in mackinaws the boys had spoken to that afternoon entered and sat beside Ed. He nodded affably to the Irishman, listened attentively, then asked if there had been any news about the robbery.

"Never a word. They'll be out of the country by now."

"Most likely. You'd a' thought the cops could of got a line on them, wouldn't yuh?"

"That's not so easy. The Mountie had nothing to work on."

"So I hear. Harder'n it seems, I guess," the man said agreeably as he gave his order. Then turning to Andy he asked jestingly, "Not chawin' beans to-night? Reckon eggs taste good after a winter in the jungle."

"Bet'cha," both boys responded heartily.

The meal continued, their acquaintance became more genial, plied them with questions, seemed interested in everything they told him. The last of the section men went out and still they lounged at the counter, looking

out on the street beyond which they could see, a hundred yards away, the closed door of their shack. They sipped their coffee, listened and talked, came again into closer touch with the world of which they had heard nothing during the long months of stern endeavor in those silent, Northland valleys.

CHAPTER XXIII

A TRUST FULFILLED

Except for one smirched window set high in the side wall, little light came into the shack after his master had gone, but Derry did not mind the gloom. Now that the place was quiet a pack rat might venture out. He knew there were pack rats here, plenty of them. Their strong, musky odor came up to him through every crack and knot-hole of the floor.

He circled the room, snuffling at likely crevices, making no sound except the soft tapping of his blunt claws upon the boards. He sniffed the cracks along the walls through which the failing daylight came in thin pencils of light, but he could get no scent of things outside because the draft of air sucked lazily outward. Any moment now a rat might appear and the monotony of waiting would be broken.

Once he pricked his ears as a sound reached him through the brawling of the creek in the bowlder-strewn gully behind the shack. It sounded like the wrangling of dogs, but he could not be sure, and when it did not come again he turned to wait for the first of those gray forms he knew could not stay in hiding long.

Suddenly he forgot the rats. He looked toward the door, then at the window, but eyes, nose and ears de-

tected nothing to verify that first vague suspicion. No sound came to him through the broken drumming of the creek, yet he could not watch for rats, would not be lulled into unwariness by this negative security. He circled the room carefully, sniffed the pack of fur in the corner, tried to peer through one of the larger chinks, then stopped alertly in the shadows near the door.

Minute after minute passed and then, from outside the rear wall of the cabin, came the merest wisp of sound, a sound no louder than that made by a scurrying rat. But Derry's head came down and the hair on neck and shoulders rose, for he knew that sound to be the cautious footfall of a man.

Every nerve in the terrier's body tingled, yet no growl or movement betrayed his presence there. When he heard the step again he began a slow advance toward the rear wall, silent as a cougar gliding to make its fatal leap. This cat-like stealth was strange in him, but it was necessary for he knew he was closing with an enemy more powerful than any he had ever faced. His tactics against bear or cougar would not serve him against an enemy more resourceful than any creature of the wilderness.

When he was half-way across the floor he saw one of the vertical chinks darken, then become light again as the form outside moved slowly toward the middle of the wall. He froze and watched while the bit of an ax was pushed into a crack. Then he caught a hissing "S-s-sic him!" and from the slope outside the wall he

heard scrambling paws advance. The ax bit twisted, there was a shrill complaint of rusted nails withdrawn, and as the board came loose, an urgent "At him, boys," brought the rough-coated dog and his two followers snarling into the breach.

Between Derry's black lips his cheek teeth gleamed in anger greater than any he had ever known and then like an arrow released he charged, took the punishment of slashing fangs as his shoulder smote the leader's chest and drove him to the edge of the bank. Snapping and writhing all four went down the bank.

When they reached the strip of gravel beside the water Derry was down, the big dog reaching for his throat, the others frantic in their haste to slash him. But like a cat Derry regained his feet, sprang aside and whipped about to face them. He caught the black dog off its guard, crunched its paw, lunged at the cowardly cross and found his back against a bowlder with the leader fairly before him. Now they would fight, and Derry, fighting like a thing possessed, knew it would be a fight to the finish.

The leader had wheeled and was boring in toward Derry's shoulder when through the red haze of battle that clouded his eyes, Derry saw the man clear the bank in a clumsy leap and come down the slope with a trickle of dislodged stones behind him, saw that on his back was slung the pack of fur he had been told to guard.

"Soak it to him," the man shouted as he plunged into

the scrub willows crowding the water's edge. Encouraged by the voice of their ally, the dogs pushed their attack and as he fought them off Derry knew he must do a thing he had never done before. He must turn his back on his enemies and run, for his own high pride, his mad desires must be sacrificed to his trust. He glimpsed an opening in the jostling line, leaped into it, broke through, shook himself free of the snapping jaws and crashed into the willows which still swayed behind the fleeing thief.

Shrill yelps of triumph overtook him as the pack swept in pursuit. These half-starved, ownerless dogs did not know what was in Derry's mind; the man, though he had fed them and brought them up the gulch, was nothing to them, all they wanted now was to close with this dog they had put to rout with such unexpected ease. Crazed with desire to drag him down they overtook Derry midway through the willow patch.

Derry heard them close on his haunches. He turned like a flash, sprang at the leader's throat, missed, drove back the black and the cross, leaped a bowlder, scrambled up a pile of driftwood and saw the man running heavily toward the bend. At the sight a wild, imperative bark came from him, a summons for his master to come before it was too late.

He had cleared the tangle. Before him lay fifty yards of hard-packed gravel. Ten unmolested seconds and he could reach the robber. But now he was sent spinning by a nip which caught a hind leg as it came

thudding down. He rolled three times over but was up and ready before they closed on him. It was a narrow escape for once they got him down and had the holds they wanted, the three dogs would never let him rise again.

Derry's spirit clamored for a fight to the finish, but as the leader raked his shoulder, he feinted, took his punishment, swerved and was on the man's trail before they recovered from the surprise of his ruse.

Running as he had never run before, Derry cleared the gravel bar in a tremendous effort to reach the man before the dogs could intervene again. Head low, body close to earth he gathered himself for one long, splendid spring, threw himself against the man's legs and brought him crashing down. High-pitched and vibrant his rallying bark rang out, and from back near the cabin he heard an answering halloo.

The man staggered to his feet, kicked awkwardly at his assailant, roared a command to the following pack and stumbled down the creek bed. Ahead, through the notch made by the raw earth walls of the gulch he could see the swirling river. Two hundred yards more and he would be safely in the boat.

As the dogs came up Derry rushed headlong at them, sent the black sprawling, flashed behind a heap of bowlders, doubled back and when he had jockeyed himself into a position which gave him a five-yard lead, he shot straight away down the gulch. He splashed through the icy water at the turn, sighted the thief,

barked sharply once and came upon him as he tried to scramble over the branches of a windfall.

As he flew to the assault he glimpsed a running figure on the bank above, heard Ed's shout, saw Andy on the opposite bank running like mad for the river. Ed bounded down the slope and the thief, turning with an oath, was seized by the shirt front in jaws that held him like a vise. His hand swung upward to crash a jagged rock against the Airedale's head and then with the snapping thud of a piledriver's hammer, Ed's fist met his chin and he crumpled with a whimper of pain.

Derry turned to face the pack, but they had read the warning of those two running forms on either bank and had turned back.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WILD STREAK

At midnight the Mountie, who had come from Division on a speeder in answer to a call over the section-house telephone, found a dozen men in the shack occupied by the boys. In the yellow light of railway lanterns he saw two men against the wall and then he knew the startling message which had reached him was confirmed.

"That's the brace we've been looking for. Good work. Who gets the credit?" he asked.

The section foreman nodded to Ed and Andy. "These boys here grabbed 'em as they were makin' off down the gulch. But their Airedale had a big share in it. He's round the shack somewhere. Have a look at him, Corporal. He'd be an ornament to any force," he added as he opened the door and lifted his lantern expecting to see Derry still occupied with the supper Ed had brought from the Silver King for him.

But Derry had disappeared.

When he finished eating, Derry had no conscious desire to stray from the cabin he had so successfully defended. A soft rain was falling and he had stood at the top of the low bank overlooking the tracks, senses alert for any interesting sound or scent which might

come to him. The stirring allure of spring was in the night and the awakening earth odors seemed to draw him on, to be trying to lead him far from the shack and the company of Ed Sibley.

In the magic of that spring night there was the same restless urge which months ago had made him roam far from Twin Forks until he found the cougar's trail. But in those months his relationship with Ed had undergone a change. He felt no puppy-like dependence on Ed now. The two were friends; a few hours ago in the fight with the fur thieves they had been allies and if ever Ed were threatened he would fight for him again. But at the same time his free spirit was untamed, it had never submitted to the kindly mastery of any human.

While he stood at the top of the railway cut a freight train came slowly around the curve to the eastward. Its headlight bored a bright tunnel through the darkness and the rain as it came to a noisy stop beside the water tower. Derry sat down to watch. The engine clanged and groaned, moved ahead with a deep hissing of steam and then when the long line of cars were on the siding it became quiet. From somewhere behind the Silver King a dog barked, insincerely menacing, and at the implied challenge of the sound Derry leaped easily down the bank and crossed the street. He still had a score to settle with the dogs who had attacked him so unfairly in the gulch. He flitted like a shadow past the café but when he reached the uneven ground

behind it the dog had disappeared. Derry listened, then moved toward the river. Without an objective for his prowl he wove his way between the blackened stumps of the clearing, moving on and on, an unfettered creature free to respond to the disturbing magic of the springtime which was tugging at his heart.

The rain had ceased as he circled back toward the slumbering town. A wind from the south drove the clouds against the northward line of peaks, broke them up like some aerial armada carried to destruction on a rock-ribbed coast and then a myriad stars shone down like the riding lights of a ghostly fleet gathered to celebrate the victory. Then, for no apparent reason, Derry broke into a mad run. On and on through the intoxicating air he raced, tireless, eager, exploring. The longing for new trails possessed him utterly, the untamed restlessness within him urged him on. Somehow he understood that Ed was heading for Twin Forks and after his free life in the mountains the routine life of the settlement where he had been reared would be dull and distasteful to him. Had Ed been starting for new country nothing could have kept the Airedale from following. But with the deadening prospect of the cramped life of the settlement before him, Derry was impatient to get away.

Every healthy dog sometimes knows the unrest which stirred Derry that night. Some long dormant voice from the dim past has called to them and for a few hours they may respond, they may run madly in the

night even as ages ago their forebears coursed the dim trails of a savage world. But for most of them the demands of discipline or of affection for their masters soon overcome the whisperings of rebellion and with the dawn they return to the routine of their ordered lives. But Derry, in spite of his liking for Ed Sibley, was still master of himself. And now as he passed the last of the charred stumps of the cleared land and saw the train hand in the lighted doorway of the freight caboose, he trotted forward, head high, tail waggling slightly, ready for whatever adventure might await him.

The brakeman grinned as he saw the jaunty figure standing in the dim light below the steps of the car. "Howdy, you old rounder," he said cheerily. "Where'd you hail from on a night like this?"

Derry eyed him critically for a moment, then satisfied that the man was friendly, he leaped nimbly to the high step and pushed his head inside the doorway. He was curious to see more of this strange place. Once or twice he had traveled on the train with Ed Sibley and the sensation of rapid motion had delighted him. The brakeman put out his hand to pat him, but Derry swung his head aside and gave him a cool look which said that while they could be agreeable he was not the sort of dog who would allow himself to be patted by people he did not know.

"Hands off, eh?" the brakeman questioned. Stray dogs often visited the caboose in these up-country set-

tlements but this was the first stray he had seen who was not looking for a meal or for human attention. "Mighty independent for a hand-out artist, ain't you?" he went on.

As he was speaking he was signaled from the head end and swinging to the ground he began to walk forward. Derry heard the crunch of his boots on the cinders as the man disappeared into the night and then he ventured warily inside the caboose. From somewhere up the tracks a bell began to jangle, the floor beneath his paws lurched, the wheels of the caboose click-clacked over the rail joints and when he trotted to the door the lights of the Silver King were moving quickly away from him.

He was crouching on the steps, tensely gathered for a wild leap from the speeding train when the brakeman coming down through the cupola, looked out the door and dragged him back in time to prevent him from breaking his neck as he struck the road bed.

"Well, mister," he warned. "If you came looking for a free ride, you're sure getting it. We're high-balled right through to Coast City. Not a chance in the world of getting outa this crummy till we hit the terminal."

Derry gave him a questioning look and then sat down beside the closed door. Later when the conductor came in the brakeman related how Derry had chanced to be caught aboard the moving train. The conductor gave Derry a calculating look.

"He doesn't look like any tramp dog," he stated. "Chances are he belongs to some guy in Twenty Mile. Soon's we finish the run I'll ask one of the hostlers to chain him up in the round house. We'll drop him off at Twenty on the next run out."

But at dawn the next morning, almost before the long train came to a stop in the terminal yards, Derry was out of the caboose,—free and a stranger in a world which was foreign to him. Two days later he was in the city pound—a prisoner.

For a week after Derry's mysterious disappearance Ed Sibley haunted Twenty Mile and the country surrounding it. A score of wild conjectures filled his mind. Perhaps Derry, unaccustomed to the railway, had been caught on the right-of-way and killed by a train. Perhaps, unknown to any of them, the two thieves had some accomplice in the town who had taken vengeance on Derry for their capture. Perhaps he had gone out to settle his score with the three dogs and had been overpowered. He and Andy searched the railway line for miles east and west of the town, thinking they might find where Derry had crawled off in the brush to nurse his wounds and die. They talked with the Irish section man but he scouted the idea that the thieves had a friend in the place. They found the three dogs Derry had battled with in the gulch but their bodies showed no wounds and both the boys knew they never could have slain the Airedale

without Derry having left his marks upon them. In turn each of their conjectures proved groundless and finally when there was nothing they could do they returned sadly to Twin Forks. The homecoming they had anticipated with such pleasure was sadly marred now, and to Hoskins Ed related the story of Derry's last heroic flight.

The kindly oldtimer listened in silence until Ed had finished. "I don't believe Derry's dead—not for a minute I don't. But jest the same I don't figger you or me'll ever set eyes on him again."

Ed started to speak, then choked back the protest he knew in his heart was vain.

"The excitement of that great fight in the gulch was too much for the old boy," Hoskins went on slowly. "It sorta set fire to all his smolderin' instincts. If Derry'd been a town dog an' been kep' on a chain and led around the block for exercise chances are that wild streak would never have developed like it did. But you take a dog like him that's been as free as a wolf way back there in the hills an' let fight and the spring weather get into his blood—well, it ain't animal nature for him to cuddle down by any man's fireside. Hyak would never 'a' done it—no more will Derry."

"But we were headed for home. He knew it too." Ed burst out in his dire perplexity. "He'd a lot of pals round town. Y'd think he'd want to come and look the place over after being away from it so long."

"Like as not that's the last thing he did want. Dogs

with that untamed streak ain't so keen on the back-trails. I've known men had it—some as died with it too. The country over the skyline, the places they had to travel far to see, that's what always drawed 'em on. An' the humans, like the Hyaks an' the Derrys, was always the kind that traveled alone. They were never the partnership kind." For no apparent reason Hoskins rose from his chair and walked across the dingy little office of the Comet to stand looking into the untidy yard behind the garage. But Ed, struggling to master the emotions welling up within him, knew the other's motive and was thankful that Hoskins was the sort of man who could understand.

"A dog's just a dog—to some folks. But I tell you Sandy, that Derry—I—" Ed felt the words were choking him. He had to stop and then, all reticence forgotten, he could not keep back the thoughts and longings which so deeply moved him.

"That dog has faced sure death for me. He never stopped to figger out his chances or to look for a way that didn't seem so dangerous. Not him, that wasn't Derry's way. He always went fair and straight. I figger if any living thing on this earth could look a man square in the eye it was him. I wish I always had the nerve to go the way he went. An' now I've lost him. Why couldn't I 'a' kept him with me? Some place or way I must 'a' fallen down."

"There wasn't a thing you could 'a' done, Ed, lad. You can't discipline 'em and if they don't care for you

like you do them you can't help it. Lots of times I've thought that if only old Hyak'd had that little twist of affection in his make-up that could 'a' kep' him with me and at the same time made him happy—but then he didn't. 'Tain't likely dogs like that ever have."

Ed sat back, pondering what Hoskins had said. That was it. If only Derry too had possessed that affection which would have kept him steadfast, which would have made him happy to stay with him. In all other ways Derry had been an even better dog than he had ever expected. It was almost a year since he had begun to hope for this perfect companionship with the Airedale. At times that hope had seemed almost fulfilled, at times it had wavered only to brighten again and now, in spite of Hoskins' warning in the fall, the end had come with crushing suddenness. And so, in spite of all his hopes this was the end.

Suddenly Ed looked directly at the old veteran of the trails. "Anyway, he went out fighting at the last." Ed spoke almost fiercely and Hoskins knew the world of pride which lay behind the words.

"Yep, he went out fighting," he agreed. And then, after a pause: "Fighting. That's how dogs like that'll always go."

But immediately his pride in Derry seemed a trifling thing to Ed. Down the drab vista of the future no light of hope showed—Derry had left him and the hurt of that desertion would linger long after pride was dead.

CHAPTER XXV

CALL OF THE HOMEWARD BOUND

Hours ago, on the street outside the high wall of the city pound, the discord of night traffic had dwindled and died. Now the long intervals of quiet between the passing of street cars was broken only by the rush of a speeding taxi or the footfalls of some belated pedestrian. The ineffectual street lights glared coldly at the vast night and in a few hours pale dawn would come again to rouse the great Coast City.

In the heavy shadow at the end of the row of kennels ranged along the wall there was the dull tinkle of a chain. A black-and-tan form, which for hours had sat there motionless, stirred wearily, then whined. It was a mere wisp of sound but in it was an intensity of yearning more eloquent than words. The thin sound trailed into silence, the chain was quiet, but still the prisoner sat with shoulders hunched and fine head low, keeping his long vigil beneath the stars.

Minutes passed, then the vagrant pointed his muzzle at the canopy of the April night and voiced his woe in the long-drawn quavering howl of a dog whose heart is tortured by grief. In all the weary month he had been a prisoner here, this was Derry's first despairing call. Now, aloof and forlorn, his great Airedale spirit

—the spirit which had never surrendered in the face of hardship or danger—was all but broken by the misery he had undergone.

His call of desolation died away. The Chow in the next kennel snarled with peevish impotence, but Derry scorned to answer. Though his body was chained, though he was a prisoner behind high walls, his heart had gone again to the distant wilds he loved. For him, night meant not the uneasy hush of cities, but strong rivers droning their eternal anthems to the dancing stars; dawn which here was ushered in by the rumble of passing milk trucks and the chime of church-tower clocks, meant bird song, clean scents on the dew-soaked moss, the rosy flush of the morning's fingers on the spires of snow-garbed peaks. The Chow snarled again and Derry's black lip lifted in a threat so sinister that the pampered house dog in daylight would have cowered before it.

Though to him this seemed the end, Derry would not cringe. Here in a world foreign to him he would face this last supreme defeat as he had faced the dangers of the adventurous life he had lived in those far-off mountains he feared he would never see again.

Gradually the stars faded out as he had seen them do so often when he rested beside the mountain campfires of Ed Sibley. But to his nostrils came no new, keen scents, there were no mists along the river sloughs, no stirring in the branches of the pines. Instead of these things he loved, there was the swelling roar of traffic,

the turmoil of this foreign land where he was held—a slave.

It was broad daylight and he was sleeping fitfully in the kennel when the pound keeper came to feed his charges.

"'Ere, Fauntleroy," grunted that shabby, good-hearted person as he gave the Chow its dish of food. But to the Airedale he spoke with understanding and rough sympathy.

Derry glanced with indifference at the proferred food and then up at the fat, unshaven face above him. His tail stub rustled the straw. This man, he knew, was kind, but in the brown eyes of the Airedale the keeper saw that smoldering fire of unrest which had fretted it for weeks.

"Come on, Wild 'Un," he urged. "Tuck into some o' that. Y'ain't et enough fer days to keep a dicky bird alive."

Derry lowered his muzzle to his paws and exhaled wearily, but under their tufted brows his eyes still dwelt on the man.

"Wish I knowed where yer from," the keeper went on. "No tag—no collar—nofink. Yer no city dog, I know that. And yer anybody's dog from to-day on. Yer up fer sale, old lad. It's a ruddy shime." He pushed the plate closer with his toe but Derry yawned and turned away.

"Poor blighter," murmured the keeper as he started across the yard.

Each day the pound of any large city is the scene of glad reunions, comedies, stark tragedies. Here pets, whose vagrant instincts have tempted them to wander, are recovered by anxious and indulgent owners; here waifs of the alleys are rescued and led away to homes of kindness; and here sometimes come shifty-minded men who scheme to profit by the misfortunes of others, who trade on sentiment and for a few dollars buy the living bodies of the homeless ones.

The morning was half gone when Derry's drowsing was broken by the shuffle of footsteps coming toward him down the yard. His chin rested on the edge of the kennel doorway and, without lifting his head, through half-open eyes he saw a burly stranger approaching. The keeper was behind him and as they talked, Derry's quick instinct detected an unusual note in the husky voice of the man who had tended him through all this weary month.

"No, ya don't," the burly man was protesting. "I know a bit of dog flesh when I lay eyes on it. Nothin' doing on that mongrel collie."

"Mongrel?" retorted the keeper. "Look how he carries 'is tail—look at his nose. There's breeding there, I tell yer."

"Fergit it. Collies ain't selling much anyhow. Police dogs—shepherds—Airedales, they're the boys fer my money. How about that one on the end there?"

"Can't sell him fer a week yet," the keeper lied. "He'll likely be claimed by that time."

"Where you get that old stuff? Say, lookit! I keep track 'a' things. I know the day that Airedale come in. His month was up yesterday." Then, seeing the keeper was about to protest, he resorted to threats. "Look, guy. You want me to jazz down to the city hall and lay a complaint? I'll have you shifted outa here quick, if I want to. I got friends. You can't hold out on me, see?"

"Well, anyhow, 'e's surly. Y'can see that. Y'd never sell him."

"Wouldn't I? I'll sell him easy enough. And if he tries out any of that surly stuff on me I'll knock it outa him so quick it'll make his head swim."

Derry was on his feet when the pair stopped before him. From the gloom of the kennel, he eyed the stranger coldly.

"Fancy stuff, all right," mused the big man, stooping to peer inside. "Feed him, comb him, and he'll bring big money. Come out here, you, and lets get a decent squint at yer lines." He seized the chain and pulled roughly.

As it came taut Derry lurched sideways so that the chain had a half-turn on the edge of the door. He braced his forelegs and drew back his head so that the leather collar was half hidden in the folds of loose hide on his rigid neck. He disliked this man and would not come out into the daylight at his command.

" 'Ere! He ain't yours yet, y'know. Y'ain't goin' to abuse him while he's in my charge." The keeper

snatched the chain from the other and, squatting on his heels, patted Derry's head until his resolve weakened and he came out reluctantly.

"He ain't suffered much," the burly man said as he eyed Derry's sturdy body.

"No?" The keeper's retort was caustic. He was thinking, not of Derry's physical condition, but of those long vigils and the quavering whines he had heard at dusk during these last few weeks.

"No, he ain't. I'll have him. What's the damage?" The man unbuckled the collar and chain.

" 'Bout ten dollars." He looked on coldly while the purchaser fastened a leash of his own about the Airedale's neck. It was at times like these that he wished he could afford to chuck his job as keeper.

Derry stalked moodily down the yard at the heels of the man. He disliked him but any change was better than those interminable nights and days in the kennel beside the wall. "So long, laddie," the keeper said to Derry as they reached the entrance. Then with a contemptuous look at the man, "I feel sorry for yer."

The man laughed harshly. "Aw, y'll bust out cryin' next. Y'should be tending a babies' home or something."

"An' you should be back at yer proper job—grave robbink," retorted the keeper as the iron gate clanged behind them. Derry gave one brief look backward.

"Step along," ordered the man, tugging at the leash. "I'm yer master. See?"

But for the fine spirit of the Airedale there could be only one master now. During those happy months when he had traveled the wilds with Ed Sibley he had not felt that deep, insistent need, that inward, fortifying sense of reliance, which a dog knows who, of his own glad will, gives his undying allegiance to a worthy human. But when the madness of that spring night had left him, and when day after day the loneliness of his confinement here had eaten into his soul, his independent spirit had undergone a lasting change. Now he wanted Ed. They had faced danger side by side and in this time of dire need he looked in vain for the youth he loved to come to him. But since that black night at Twenty Mile, Ed Sibley had been lost to him. Night after night he had stood inside the wall, ears lifted, nerves tingling in anticipation of that well-remembered footfall which had never come.

Derry was led across the street and bundled into a decrepit flivver. He was taken through the dense downtown traffic where motors and street cars shuttled confusedly. Then down a cross avenue he saw, far away through the pall of city smoke, the undulating skyline made by the summits of the eastward mountain range. Deep within him a pang of longing and something of remembrance stirred. He whined, that same thin whine of the lonesome nights, but now with a note of purpose and eagerness in it.

"Shut up," the man commanded.

They had turned now. The streets were deep

ravines between warehouses before which were drays and heavy trucks. Then they jolted over railway tracks and Derry, straining at his leash, crooked his brown paws over the top of the car door and stretched his neck in a frenzy of impatience. Here was a place he remembered. He whined and scrambled to escape. The man tugged on the leash, told him harshly to be still and when the dog persisted he drew to the curb and raised his hand to cuff him to obedience.

But that blow was never struck, for deep in the eyes of the Airedale were two points of warning fire. No growl, no change of posture, were needed to tell the man what he would do, but the hand came slowly to the steering wheel again.

"Y'would, heh?" The man was startled. "You wait. I'll knock them fancy notions outa yer crazy head."

Derry gave no sign that he had heard, but his eyes, cold and intent, never left the hand which had been lifted against him.

A block beyond the railway yards they turned into an unpaved street, turned again into an alley and stopped behind a corrugated iron shed. A moment later Derry was tethered inside and the man went out, bolting the door behind him and leaving the dog a closer prisoner than he had been at the pound.

Hour after hour passed and no one came. Each time that footsteps sounded in the alley, Derry's ears lifted to listen as he had listened to the daily procession of feet outside the wall of his former prison. There he

had waited week after week for the approach of his master and now, because he was in a different place, he listened with renewed hope for the footfall which to him was like no other in the world.

It was late afternoon when the man unbolted the door and entered with a companion younger than himself, a man with a pallid, narrow face.

"There y'are," said the man who had come to the pound. "What you think of him?" There was a note of triumph in his voice which Derry, with feet spread and head watchfully low, did not miss.

"Fancy stuff, all right," drawled the other. "Coat's kinda ragged, but that's easy fixed. Didn't get no line on the pedigree?"

Derry saw the big man shake his head.

"Don't matter much. I got some kennel club forms. Pinched 'em. All you got to do is slap on a lot of highfalutin names and they'll fall for it."

"Yeh—the poor saps."

"How's his temper. Looks ready to chaw any guy went near him."

"Pretty near tackled me in the car. Now lookit. I'm gonna lam the fight clean outa him. But I don't want to start that stuff round here, account of the noise. So how about taking him out to your place to-night?"

"Sure. I'll be pullin' for home about ten. I'll drive round and we'll pick him up."

"Jake. He'll lick my boots 'fore I'm finished. Any-

how, no guy can pull a good line to a buyer when the hound's standing there looking ugly as sin all the time he's making the spiel."

The other, with hands in pockets and soggy cigarette end dangling from the corner of his mouth, took one step nearer the corner, then hesitated. Derry's neck and head had straightened to the level of his shoulders and that cold, relentless gleam had hardened his eyes again. Their faces and the tones of their voices told him both were hostile to him and a growl—low-pitched, harsh, intense—gave them fair warning he was ready to defend himself. Once he had fought men to protect his master's property—now he was prepared to fight for himself.

"Ugly. Yer darn ca-hootin'!" the smaller man drawled as he backed away. "You an' me's gonna have a lot 'a' fun before we see the last of each other—on'y you ain't gonna enjoy none of it."

Derry sensed that while the other man was violent of temper and a blusterer, here was one whose cruelty was cold as ice, who would enjoy inflicting torture as, in the clearings of the settlement, he had seen half-wild cats toy with fledglings and wounded birds. Then and there the Airedale knew that the instant this enemy closed with him he would attack. That morning he had been ready to snap at the hand of the big man in self-defense. When the time came for him and the other man to fight he would have but one target—he would fly like an avenging arrow straight for his throat. For

he knew that this man with the slow voice and the eyes of an exultant cougar would not hesitate to kill him.

They talked a moment or two longer and then went out. While they stood before him, Derry's paws had not shifted an inch, but as their steps died away he sprang to action.

During the following hours of solitude in that drab, evil-smelling place some inheritance from ancestors of the far-off past came to life in the Airedale. He was no longer the perplexed stray of the pound, a dog sick with longing for master and home country, but a creature of the wilds—caged, frantic, face to face with death. Though the odds against him were colossal he would fight to the end. Never, never would he surrender.

Unlike a panic-stricken forest dweller, he did not struggle blindly to escape. There was method in his attack, the method of one who knows men and the ways of men. After a few unavailing plunges he turned and deliberately began to chew the stout strap that held him. On the strap, which bore the tooth marks of former prisoners, his strong molars worked until he had made it soft and slippery. Then he squatted on his haunches, held it between his even front teeth, shredding the tough fibre, plucking it to pieces particle by particle. With each tug his neck was arched, his jaw muscles set, and sometimes when the teeth slipped they clicked together like the edges of a pair of cutting pliers. When the shed was dark, and out-

side dusk had fallen he severed this bond that held him. He trotted along the walls, testing them for some loophole of escape, he dug furiously at the corners, but at ten o'clock when the flivver came down the alley and stopped outside he was still a prisoner.

The men got out and Derry saw the flickering glint of a flashlight while they stood outside and talked guardedly. Erect in the darkness, on his guard in the middle of the shed, he waited for the battle to begin, the battle which would be more desperate than any in his adventurous career. In his time he had fought cougar, wolf, grizzly, but now in this dark shed he was to face foes more cunning and sinister than any one of these. Jaws clenched, head low, tail high and challenging, he stood ready for the conflict. In his mind one single purpose glowed like a red flame and at this high moment all thoughts of escape left him.

And then, through the lessening drone of the great city, through the broken rumble of the voices outside the wall, came an eerie clamoring from high above the lighted streets. Once as a young dog he had heard this flighting call of the wild geese above his mountain valley. Then it had spurred him to flee from his master and range beneath the evergreens alone. It was the call of wild, unfettered things, the call that is age-old and ever new, and it spoke to him now of rivers, mountains and the brooding forests of the Northland—and Ed Sibley. Faint, insistent, compelling—for him it

was the exultant rallying-cry of the homeward bound. And he knew, even as those ghostly migrants knew they must return to the North which bore them, that he must respond.

The door was only half open when a black-and-tan body flashed into the opening, sent the smaller man staggering and sped down the alley toward the side-street. There were shouts, the roar of a racing engine and by the time Derry was beneath the street light at the corner the car was in pursuit.

The men saw him turn out of the side-street into the main road, they were close behind him as he reached the railway crossing, and when he swerved and raced along the tracks they stopped the car and ran behind him toward the station. They thought the dog had taken this course because in the maze of tracks and switches there would be hiding places. They could not understand that it was here he had left the freight train and that his struggles in the car that morning had been an effort to return to this one place in the city that he knew.

The Canyon Limited was about to leave the station when Derry, attracted by the lights and the sight of hurrying people, galloped along the platform. The Irish section foreman, who was in the cab of the locomotive riding dead head home to Twenty Mile, was watching the engineer take his orders from the conductor when a moving form under the nearest arc light

caught his eye. He pushed two big fingers into his mouth and whistled. The dog under the arc light looked questioningly about him.

"Hey—you Derry dog!" He shouted and came down the steps from the cab. The certainty with which the Airedale sped toward him made him positive that this was young Sibley's lost dog.

The conductor, watch in hand, was at the steps of the first Pullman ready to wave the highball when he saw the Irishman in violent controversy with two gesticulating men. He ran up the train—he saw the Irishman's fist swing into the face of the larger man—he saw the massive, overalled figure mount the steps to the cab with an Airedale dog under his arm and by the time he reached the scene the drive wheels were beginning to turn.

The Limited was well into the canyon where only a strip of star-strewn sky showed between the towering mountain walls before the Irishman spoke to the dog on the fireman's seat beside him. "Kinda large order, wasn't it, pup—you getting all set to tackle that brace o' skunks? Though by the way you started I figger y'd done the job up handsome. That old man o' yours is about ready to travel the hills again. In the morning when he sets eyes on you he'll jump his job—just to let off steam. He'll be mighty glad to see you."

And Derry, his muzzle over the sill, his ears flat against the rush of wind as he sniffed the clean night air, peered down the lane of brightness between the

singing rails and made one happy sound of triumph deep in his throat. For now the past did not matter—now he was on the trail that would bring him to Ed Sibley with the dawn.

THE END

LASSIE COME-HOME

By Eric Knight

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